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IN FAR LOCHABER BY WILLIAM BLACK.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. 2.

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VOL. II.

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REITH ALTHOR

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VOL. 2578

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IN FAR LOCHABER

A NOVEL

BY

WILLIAM BLACK,

AUTHOR OF "A PRINCESS OF THULE," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1889.



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IN FAR LOCHABER.

CHAPTER I.

INTERVENTION.

A LONG and dreary winter followed; and the slow weeks and months seemed to plunge Kirk o' Shields into an ever-increasing gloom. Sometimes the land lay hard and silent in the grip of a black frost; and then there was no breath of wind to stir the atmosphere; the fumes and vapors hung heavy in the motionless air, so that people forgot what the sky was like. Sometimes a bewilderment of snow was abroad; and then through the pervading mist the far uplands could be seen to be of a phantom white; but in the town itself and all round about it the snow was immediately dusted over with coal, where it was not trodden into mire. And then again would come persistent rain; but here there was some little compensation; for if the day-time showed the very extreme of wretchedness and

squalor, the night made the flames of the great furnaces more resplendent than ever, as the crimson glow flashed across the wet slates of the house-roofs. Altogether a miserable winter it was, numbing the mental faculties and cramping the bodily powers; but the members of East Street congregation abated not one jot or tittle of their strict observances; no matter how hard or wet the weather, every Sabbath morning found them slowly and decorously taking their places in the cold, damp-smelling pews; while the attendance at the Weekly Prayer-meetings, the Bible Classes, the Young Men's Christian Association, and so forth was undiminished.

During all this time Alison's anxieties and duties were considerably increased by the fact that her sister Agnes, never very strong, seemed to grow more and more liable to attacks of nervous weakness or excitability; and as these frequently culminated in sleep-walking, Alison had to be on the alert by night as well as by day. It was so strange to be in this little room that seemed filled with the sombre glow of the iron-works, and to watch the timidly uplifted appealing hand, and to hear the murmured, "Mother!" which told how far away the spirit was from its frail tenement of a body. Agnes Blair, at all events, had one way of escape from the desolation that overshadowed Kirk o' Shields. Night brought her release, and carried her away to far and shining regions, where she met the

gentle-visaged mother who was waiting for her with outstretched hands. Alison could see her slip noiselessly from the bed, her large gray eyes entranced and still; and for a moment she would remain uncertain, as if it took that space of time to waft her across the black night to the mystic splendor of a perpetual dawn—to the great wall of jasper and the radiant gates of the new Jerusalem. Then she would whisper, "Mother!" her gentle guide was found; these two were walking now through the wonderful streets in the city that had "no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof;" and the rapt eyes were gazing on the tree of life, and on the river of the water of life, clear as crystal, that came flowing from the great white throne. And then sometimes (in this little room, in the silence, with Alison half afraid to follow her lest she should rouse her too suddenly) the younger sister would raise her hand slightly, and stand transfixed, as if she were intently listening. Listening to what?—to the distant singing of the ransomed hosts, or to the voice of the angel proclaiming aloud the doom of Babylon the Great? These were sleepless nights for Alison, though her sister in her unconscious state was amenable enough; and next morning Agnes had no knowledge of these restless wanderings, save as a wistful dream.

Perhaps the elder sister was not altogether sorry to have the whole burden of the domestic duties, and of the charitable labor expected from the Minister's family, devolve upon her own shoulders; for there were many things she wished to forget, and she found that resolute hard work was the best means towards that end. Not that she could entirely banish by-gone occurrences from her mind; for now and again there came a letter from her cousin in Fort William, which was sure to contain some news of Ludovick Macdonell, even when it did not enclose, as frequently happened, some written communication from himself, addressed to Flora. He was in Egypt now, and on his way to India, where he vaguely hinted that there was some chance of his getting an appointment; but in the mean time the winter society in Cairo seemed extremely pleasant, and he was in no hurry to leave.

"But look here, my dear Miss Dimity," Flora wrote, in enclosing one of these epistles, "I don't quite understand why, in the midst of such gayety, and with all those nice people being kind to him, he should be sighing and pining for his native land. If he wants to come home, what's to hinder? And there's such a lot to pine for at this present moment! You should see Fort William now, Miss Dimity—dead—dead as a door-nail; all the rowing-boats high and dry in the back-yards; all the yachts gone; and the sea-birds find the

place so entirely to their mind that you can hear oystercatchers whistling all along the shore, and see skarts sailing about and bobbing their heads within a stone's-throw of the house. There's no bustle *now* at the quay when the *Mountaineer* comes in; and what's the use of making yourself very smart and nice, and going down to meet her, when there's never a man on board younger than the captain, or perhaps a commercial traveller bound for Inverness? We're all asleep here; the weather is perfectly clear and still; the hills and the loch are as much in a dream as we are; and when the fiend John, no matter how far away he is, fires his pistol at some harmless bird on the shore, you would think the whole world was listening. By-the-way, if Ludovick is discontented amid his southern gayeties, why doesn't he come home for the winter shooting, which is very good about Oyre? Hugh was to have come through from Edinburgh; and I should like to see the boy again, notwithstanding that he hates the whole of us poor women creatures. I don't understand why Ludovick should stop in Egypt, or in India either, if he would rather be at home.

“But what is far more extraordinary is that he should take such pains to write to me so minutely about himself and his doings. I was never so honored before, I assure you. Really, this sudden friendship is very flattering; and I begin to think I am not quite so

contemptible a being as Hugh would make me out, even if I can't throw a stone straight. And, indeed, I don't know that I am not betraying confidence in letting you see these letters; but then, on the other hand, I have sent him such news of you as I could, for let me tell you, my dear Miss Dimity, you are a pretty poor correspondent. I *did* think you might have told me a little more about the breaking off of that affair between you and Ludovick—for it was precious little I could get out of *him*; but I suppose in such a very delicate matter it is best for outsiders to remain outsiders; and I have no doubt that what you did was for the best. But I can't help being a little sorry sometimes; for, to speak honestly, he is a *real good fellow*, and I am sure he was very fond of you; and it would have been very nice for us to have had you as a neighbor at Oyre. However, it's no use talking now."

It was no use talking now; that was all gone and done with; indeed, the matrimonial project that at the moment was before Alison's mind, or rather pressed in upon her attention, was of a very different cast. The Rev. James Cowan was now openly and avowedly a suitor for her hand, though, to be sure, his mother did most of the wooing for him. But that astute little woman had come to see that nothing was to be hoped for from this poor lad of hers accompanying his parents to the Minister's house, and sitting in hopeless apathy

until they were ready to come away again. It was in vain that the fond mother praised the logic of James's sermons, and repeated sayings of his, which were mostly of her own invention, and tried to draw him into conversation with the Minister, so long as the listless-eyed, down-spirited, pale-faced probationer had never a word for Alison, and, indeed, covertly and quickly avoided her when there was a chance of meeting her in the streets of Kirk o' Shields. So at last Mrs. Cowan bethought her of a means of spurring him on.

"Ye see, James," said she, with a fine affectation of frankness, "your father and me have never liked looking forward to your leaving Corbieslaw; and you are the only son now; and we had been thinking that even if ye married, while as yet ye hadna a church, ye might bring your wife to the farm, and she might just help to cast an eye o'er things that will be her ain by-and-by. But maybe that's short-sighted. Ye'll be going away from Corbieslaw, James, sooner or later, when ye get a call; and I've been considering that it might be better for ye in many ways to make the change now. If ye were to marry Alison Blair, and go to Edinburgh, and take a bit house there for yourselves, ye would be mair among folk, and have a better chance of getting a congregation; and I'm sure that Mrs. Gilchrist, wi' a' that distillery money, would see that her niece was well

provided for. We'll do our pairt; and though I'm sweirt to break into the store o' napery at Corbieslaw, still there's enough and to spare for the quiet way ye would be beginning; and surely it would be ill done o' Mrs. Gilchrist, after a' the fuss she has made about Alison Blair, if she did not do something real handsome. That would be a chance for ye, James; ye ought to see folk; better for ye to be in Edinburgh, ready to step into any vacant pulpit that offers, than writing sermons at Corbieslaw."

She had hit the nail on the head this time. The possibility of having a house of his own—of escaping from the brutal tyranny and contempt of his ghoulish father—awoke a world of new ideas and half-piteous hopes in the breast of the luckless probationer; and as it seemed that Alison Blair was to be the means of his deliverance, he turned to her with a sort of mute and wistful appeal. He did not speak. But he patiently walked home from church every Sabbath day with Alison and her sister; and the congregation soon began to make comments—the elders being of opinion that if this lad married the Minister's daughter, Alexander Cowan of Corbieslaw would be more domineering in the church than ever, their wives hinting that Mrs. Cowan was a shrewd and a sharp woman, who had an eye on the money that every one knew was coming to Alison.

Indeed, in time it came to be regarded as a settled affair; and Mrs. Cowan was not the one to contradict any such pleasant rumor. In fact, she herself went to the Minister to demand his approval. Now, in Kirk o' Shields, as has already been said, not only was all outward expression of the natural affections severely checked, but it was considered almost unseemly to mention them. The word "love" was never used at all, except in a pious sense. When Mrs. Cowan went to the Minister to tell her story, and to gain his consent, he was exceedingly embarrassed and even resentful at being approached on such a subject. He had no thought of inquiring how the young people were disposed towards each other; still less would it have entered his mind to go to his daughter and ask for any confidence. He dismissed Mrs. Cowan as quickly as he could; and she went away well content; for she could easily twist about the one or two half-impatient phrases he had used so as to convince Alison that her father was looking forward to seeing her become James Cowan's wife.

And as for Alison herself? Well, if the young probationer had come forthwith and abruptly asked her to marry him, she would probably, with a touch of her father's impatience, have told him not to make a fool of himself, and so made an end of that matter. But there was something pathetic in the spectacle of

this poor lad, frightened-eyed and cowed of manner, mutely sitting in the corner of the room, or humbly endeavoring, perhaps, to say a word or two to the Minister when some professional subject was brought forward. He sent Alison one of his manuscript sermons, which was a harmless kind of gift. Out of mere curiosity she read it. It really was a most business-like production; carefully divided and arranged; and if there was not much of the burning fire of rhetoric in it, at least it was clear and sensible and simple in style. The text was I. Corinthians, II. 14: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned;" and the main argument was that the mystery of godliness was beyond the reach of reason, and that human knowledge, while efficient within its own sphere, was wholly inefficient, and not to be regarded, when it attempted to deal with the higher things of faith. She thought it was exceedingly well constructed; and, being of a kindly disposition, she said so to the young man, whose pallid face flushed up between embarrassment and pleasure, for he was not accustomed to appreciation. But when Mrs. Cowan heard of this approval, and proudly came to Alison, and asked her what she thought of James's future now—plainly intimating that Alison herself was concerned—the girl grew somewhat grave and

reserved. It is true that it had been conveyed to her that her father would be well pleased if she married the young minister; and she could understand that the congregation generally would approve of such a step; but at all events, the time was not yet; and her brows gathered together a little when she found the farmer's wife taking the whole thing for granted.

But the most startling event that occurred this winter—or rather the early spring it was now—was a sudden and unexpected visit from Aunt Gilchrist, who descended like a blast from the mountains in this dull level of dreariness. The tempestuous small dame had quarrelled with one of her fellow-patients at the Crieff Hydropathic Establishment; had instantly resolved to leave and bestow her patronage on the rival resort in the island of Bute; and as she had to pass through Kirk o' Shields on the way, she wrote that she would arrive there on the following afternoon, and would stay the night. Alison read this letter with a quick joy at her heart. Here was some one associated with that happy and beautiful time she had spent in the Highlands; here was some one to whom she could talk about those kind friends in the north. And on the morning on which she got this note, Kirk o' Shields was looking almost cheerful. A cold north-west wind had been blowing overnight, and some of the smoke was cleared away; so that there was a faint semblance of

sunlight on the gray pavements; and the spire of the Established Church, on the top of the little hill, rose into clouds that here and there grew thin and showed a wan suggestion of blue. But by the time it was necessary for Alison to go along to the station, the afternoon of the short day was closing over; and the smoke-clouds seemed to gather together again; so that Kirk o' Shields presented its usual appearance—with its crimson fires and white blasts of steam leaping and twisting and writhing into the desolation of the now darkening heavens.

“And here’s my bit lady!” Aunt Gilchrist called aloud, the moment she stepped on to the platform, and the bright-eyed, fresh-complexioned, silver-haired little dame caught Alison by the shoulders, and kissed her again and again. “Well, well, it’s just a delight to see you; for I’ve been a lone, lone woman, Alison, my dear, since I went to the Hydropathic; and many’s the time I’ve wished ye were with me, just to stand up for me, and teach them no to trample on a poor old creature like me. And I’ve booked all my luggage through to Glasgow, Alison; so that I’ve nothing but this bit bag here; and we’ll get into a cab at once—”

“A cab, Aunt Gilchrist!” said Alison, in dismay. “Do you really want a cab? For there isn’t such a thing in Kirk o’ Shields.”

“Bless my soul and body, what kind of a town is

this!" the old dame exclaimed, but she was in far too good humor over seeing her niece to be seriously put about. "And where's the gas? Do they no see it's dark? Or is this the only kind o' daylight they've got in this dreadfu' place—"

"If you would rather not walk, aunt," Alison said, doubtfully, "I could send for a machine—"

"Away wi' your machines!" Aunt Gilchrist cried. "We'll just set out on foot—it'll serve to keep Periphery in proper subjection. And ye'll carry my bag for me, Alison, and let me lean on your arm; for you're a strong young lass, for all your delicate complexion; and many's the time I wished ye were at Crieff to fight my battles for me. Ye would have taught them something, I'm thinking!—for ye've a sharp tongue in your head when ye like—oh ay—"

"I should not have thought you wanted any help in that way, aunt," her niece said, demurely, as they left the station.

"Now, Alison Blair, don't be impertinent to an old woman like me," Aunt Gilchrist made answer, with great severity, "the very moment I set eyes on ye! Who else would have come to see ye in such a fear-some hole as this—mercy on me, it's like the bottomless pit! Surely it's worse since I was here last—how many years was that? It's enough to frighten a body—ye'd think ye'd got into the bad place by some kind

o' accident, and without a chance o' getting out again. Does any human creature ever come here that can avoid it?"

"Oh, we don't mind it, Aunt Gilchrist; we're used to it," Alison said, cheerfully. "And this morning the town was looking quite pleasant; we could actually see the sun shining—or something like it. But I think it was getting your letter, aunt, that made the morning seem so bright and nice."

"Ay, ye're there again, are ye, with your palavering tongue!" the old dame protested; but all the same, she clung a little closer to the warm young arm that gave her such help as she wanted; and in this wise, and without any great quarrelling, they by-and-by reached the Minister's house.

"How are ye, Minister, how are ye?" said Aunt Gilchrist, gayly, as she entered the parlor with outstretched hand.

"I am fairly well in health," the Minister made answer, in his slow and serious fashion. "But the years are passing over us, Jane; it is time we should be preparing ourselves for the long journey."

"I'm no come to that yet," said Aunt Gilchrist, briskly. "I'm going to Rothesay. Rothesay's a grand place in cold weather like this; the sea-air is as soft as soft; and there are no crowds o' tourist-bodies swarming

about in the spring. Alison, my dear, I would like a cup of tea."

"Yes, indeed, aunt, you shall have that at once," her niece said promptly; "and then in a little while you must have something more substantial; for one of the elders is coming in this evening, with his wife and son—I would rather have had you all to ourselves, but this is a long-standing engagement—and we shall all have a proper tea together."

"An elder?" said Aunt Gilchrist, with a bit of a sniff. "I hope the body is not going to preach at me."

Indeed, her attitude towards the whole Cowan family, when they arrived, was soon seen to be distinctly hostile; but her special antagonism seemed to be aroused by the thick-lipped, wide-nostrilled, heavy-headed farmer, whose ponderous assumption of importance seemed to irritate this alert little person beyond all endurance. As for Mrs. Cowan of Corbieslaw, no sooner did she discover who this unknown visitor was than instantly she set to work to propitiate Aunt Gilchrist by every description of servile fawning and flattery. The small, shrewd eyes expressed an eager approval of everything that Mrs. Gilchrist said; it was Mrs. Gilchrist alone who was listened to—and listened to with humbly appreciative smiles and nods. Poor James was nowhere.

The presence of this stranger annihilated him. But sometimes he looked at Alison—perhaps wistfully thinking of his chances of escape to Edinburgh.

Now, when this evening meal was over, Aunt Gilchrist was naturally looking forward to a pleasant little chat about friends and acquaintances, or about affairs of the day—notably a murder-trial that was then exciting much interest; but this frivolous waste of time in nowise commended itself to Mr. Cowan of Corbieslaw. By sheer weight of words he bore down all opposition until there was nothing heard but an interminable monologue on church government, to which the Minister listened with a kind of abstracted air, only putting in a correcting word now and again. Aunt Gilchrist began to fret and fume. Once or twice she turned to Alison with a look of amazement, apparently asking if this was the kind of evening she usually passed. And still the elder labored on with his somnolent and confused incoherences about synods and presbyteries, until the brisk little dame abruptly addressed her niece.

“I’m thinking this is pretty dry work!” said she, contemptuously. “It makes me wish the Doctor was here—and the decanter.”

Alison smiled.

“I’ve provided that for you, aunt,” said she, and forthwith—to the wonderment and consternation of the

Corbieslaw family—she deliberately went to the side-board and brought out an old-fashioned decanter of cut crystal, which was filled with some dark ruby fluid. Then she produced a wine-glass, and a tumbler, and some sugar, and some cinnamon, while Agnes was sent to fetch boiling water.

“There, now,” said Aunt Gilchrist, with her bright-colored face beaming with satisfaction (and the elder had been startled into a momentary silence), “that’s like my bit lady—everything straight, and honest, and aboveboard; no tricks, and hiding, and make-believe. I don’t like the hole-and-corner bedroom business at the Hydropathics; but then, to be sure, it’s hard to go to bed on a cold winter’s night without a drop o’ something to comfort ye—”

“It’s quite true, Mrs. Gilchrist,” said Mrs. Cowan, in her suavest manner, “yes, it’s quite true.”

“It would be better,” said the farmer, scowling at his wife, “if ye would remember that that drop o’ something is just the curse of this country.”

“Ay, do ye say that now?” remarked Aunt Gilchrist, as she coolly began to prepare her negus, Alison helping her the while. “Well, I’m no the country, and it never cursed me.”

“I’m sure of that, Mrs. Gilchrist,” said the farmer’s wife, in her politest Edinburgh accent. “Everybody

can see that. I'm sure ye take nothing but what is good for ye."

The scowl on the farmer's face grew darker as he heard his wife thus shamelessly go over to the enemy; but he held his peace; perhaps in his dull brain there was some glimmering guess at the reason for her extraordinary complacency. Meanwhile the determined little wine-bibber at the table had begun to sip her negus with much satisfaction—never dreaming of the notable discovery she was shortly to make.

"Well, Minister," said she, "I'm thinking I would just like to take Alison away with me to Rothesay for a week or two. I'm sure the poor thing wants a breath of fresh air after being so long in this dreadfu' town. A town?—it's not like a town at all; it's like a pandemonium. I should think ye would have little difficulty in describing to your congregation the terrors of the place of punishment—ye've but to bid them look around them. And I would like to take her away for a week or two, just to cheer her up; for they're no so bad, they Hydropathics, after a'; they have their bits o' diversions—a dance now and again, and the like—"

"Dancing!" exclaimed the big elder, in solemn tones. "I should not like to hear o' a minister's daughter taking to dancing. We ken what comes o' dancing. We ken what happened in the time of Herod the tetrarch—"

"Herod the tea-tray!" said the impatient little dame, with open scorn. "Do ye imagine that a young Scotch lass cannot dance a Highland Schottische without wanting somebody's head served up in a charger?"

"Jane," said the Minister, severely, "I think your mention of scriptural things might be a little more respectful and becoming."

"Well, indeed, Mrs. Gilchrist," the farmer's wife interposed, to make all things smooth and pleasant, "there may not be so much harm in dancing as people say. No, not *quite* so much as they say. I hardly approve of it myself, any more than Alexander does; but maybe there's not *quite* so much harm in it. Besides, the younger people have newer ideas, so to speak, and I'm not sure that James would set his face altogether against dancing—dancing in moderation, that is—in reasonable sobriety and moderation."

Aunt Gilchrist directed a swift glance towards James; but the abashed probationer instantly lowered his eyes.

"I would like to take Agnes too," she resumed, turning again to the Minister, "but I'm afraid ye cannot spare them both; if ye can, I'll just be too glad."

"It's a kind offer, Jane," the Minister made answer, "and I'm sure the girls are obliged to you; but Agnes is hardly well enough to go anywhere at present, and as for Alison, I doubt if she could leave her various

duties, outside the house as well as in, with a clear conscience. She was a long time with you last summer."

"If I may speak," observed Mrs. Cowan, with an engaging humility, "if I may speak, I would say this, Mrs. Gilchrist, that it would be a useful experience for us all, but especially for Miss Agnes, if ye were to take Miss Blair away wi' ye for the time ye propose; for then we should a' have to learn how to do without her. And perhaps ye may have heard," the farmer's wife continued, with a significant little simper, "that we are expecting some such change?"

"What's that?" said Aunt Gilchrist, sharply, and she glanced with a sudden surprise from Mrs. Cowan to Alison, and back again, and even at the white-faced young probationer, who had furtively looked up.

"Oh, well," said Mrs. Cowan, not to over-emphasize the hint—for she could see that Alison was grievously confused—"a young lady naturally looks forward to changing her name sooner or later, and it's just as well that her friends and her family should have learned to bear the loss—for I'm sure you'll agree with me, Mrs. Gilchrist, that it will be a great loss to them in the case of Miss Blair."

This plausible explanation in nowise quieted Aunt Gilchrist's suspicions; and the first thing she did as

soon as the Cowans were gone was to go to her own room and summon Alison thither.

"Alison," said she, "what did that simpering idiot o' a woman mean? Is there a talk of your getting married?"

"I believe there is, aunt," the girl answered.

"To whom, then?" demanded Aunt Gilchrist, with an ominous frown.

"Well," said Alison, after a moment's hesitation, "to—to the young man who was here to-night—young Mr. Cowan."

"What!" exclaimed the little dame, taking a step backward in order the better to stare at her niece. "What! To that creature! To that wizened wisp of a thing! To that voiceless, washed-out rag of a stickit minister? Alison Blair, have ye taken leave of your senses?"

"Well, they all seem to expect it—that's all I know about it," Alison said, petulantly; for it was hard for her to be reproached for what was none of her doing or wishing.

"But you yourself—what do you say?" was the next sharp question.

"I haven't been asked," she answered, with her petulance darkening to sullenness.

"Now, Alison, don't make me angry!" her aunt exclaimed. "Don't you quarrel with me. Are you going

to marry that insignificant creature out of spite—is that it? Oh, mind you, I’ve seen that done often enough. I’ve seen girls marrying out of spite, and precious sick and sorry they were afterwards. Your family and your friends won’t let you marry the man you want, and so you revenge yourself on them by marrying a man you hate or care nothing about. Is that what ye’re after?”

“No, it is not!” said Alison, with proud lips, but with tears near coming to her eyes. “It is not, and you’ve no right to say any such thing.”

“Oh, very well, very well!” said Aunt Gilchrist, still regarding her niece doubtfully. “But what about that young Macdonell? Answer me that now, Alison, for I’ve heard something from Flora.”

“Captain Macdonell and I are the best friends in the world, and we mean to remain so, and I don’t care who knows it,” the girl answered, with the same proud expression of face, though her head was partly turned away.

Aunt Gilchrist looked at her for several seconds in silence.

“Ye’re a queer creature, Alison; and I’m not sure that I’ve quite made ye out yet. But I’m not going to quarrel with ye, for all your stiff-neckedness and pride and wilfulness. I’ll talk to ye in the morning. I’m not going to let you make a fool o’ yourself, if I can help it. Oh, I know what you wilful young hussies are

capable o' doing when people thwart you; and here you've been nursing schemes and plans, and not a word to me, not a word, though I thought I had some right to be consulted. Oh yes, yes, yes," she continued, as if some new light were breaking in upon her. "I see now why that cringing, crimping, smirking creature o' a woman was a' bows and becks and smiles. My certes, here's a pretty clanjamfrey of a project to be building up in the dark! Oh yes, to be sure, Mrs. Gilchrist was always in the right; and there mightn't be *quite* so much harm in dancing; and Miss Blair *ought* to go away to the Hydropathic, that we might try how we could bear her loss, while that great big yellow-faced, sow-snouted lump of a man sate and stared at my bit drop o' negus as if he thought Satan was likely to make a sudden appearance on the table. But never you mind, Alison, my dear. They havena carried off my bit lady yet! No, they have not; and maybe they'll just find out that they've to settle wi' me first. So just give me a kiss, my dear, and say good-night."

Alison's face had considerably lightened at these kinder tones, and she would have bid her aunt good-night as she desired; but as the Minister's daughter she was bound to remember the rules of the house.

"Are you not going down again, aunt?" she asked. "Father will expect you at family worship, and I hear the servants just going in."

"You pretty Miss Innocence!" this audacious little woman exclaimed, with a wicked laugh—and she pushed the girl to the open door, and kissed her affectionately by way of saying good-night. "Don't you see that that's the very reason why I'm going to bed?"

CHAPTER II.

A SUMMONS.

AUNT GILCHRIST came and went; the young Spring days began to lengthen—even in this sombre Kirk o' Shields; and Alison, with a calm serenity of mind that she mistook for forgetfulness, busied herself from hour to hour with her various tasks, and strove to earn, or to continue, the good-will of all these diverse folk—many of them intractable enough, some meanly suspicious of her advances, others “dour” to a degree—who made up her father's congregation. But especially was she kind and considerate towards James Cowan; for the poor pale-faced probationer, whatever his pathetic fancies may have been, did not bother her much; while his mother, despite her insinuating smiles and hints addressed to Alison, failed to drive the disheartened lad into any more resolute attitude. Alison was grateful to him for his silence; and she read the two or three sermons he timidly submitted to her; and comforted him with the assurance that they would be very useful to him when he received the long-looked-for call.

But this tranquil life was about to be disturbed. Summer-time found Aunt Gilchrist again at Fort William; and nothing would do the imperious small dame but that Alison should repair thither at once. Periphery, she wrote, had been almost entirely subjugated and driven forth—though sometimes it returned and feebly tried to regain possession; she was going to make up for all the crippled time; Alison was to come and share in her wild diversions; and no longer need the bit lady fear being buffeted about by any fitful gusts of temper. Agnes, she was glad to hear, appeared to be quite strong again; very well, let her take a turn at managing the Minister's house; the elder sister deserved a holiday; besides, Aunt Gilchrist demanded that she should come, and there was to be no argument, but immediate obedience.

When Alison received this summons her heart fell to beating with a marvellous rapidity; and she was somewhat breathless and bewildered, and also not a little resentful against herself that so simple a proposal should so entirely upset her peace of mind. For she had come to consider all that had happened in the previous summer as a sort of dream, to be regarded with a touch of tenderness, perhaps, until it should finally fade away and be forgotten. But this possibility of reawakening associations, of seeing actual places that had become almost visionary to her, and of meet-

ing, not the vague phantoms that dwelt in her solitary reveries, but the living people themselves, was altogether a startling thing. Instinctively she shrank back from it. And then again she began to argue with herself. What had she to dread? The days of cruel anxiety, of bitter farewells, of hidden heartache, were all over now. She had schooled herself into acquiescence. And why should she be afraid to meet Ludovick Macdonell? He and she had promised to be fast friends: and what was the friendship worth if she was not prepared to abide by it? Probably by this time he had half forgotten her. In his numerous letters from Egypt and from India he had hardly ever mentioned her. If she went to Fort William she would merely find that she had one acquaintance the more—that is, if he happened to be in Lochaber at all.

Indeed, when the Minister's consent had been obtained and her brief preparations made, and when she was ready to set forth upon her northward journey, she had almost convinced herself that she could meet Captain Ludovick without any too serious qualm, and that in returning to Lochaber she was not risking the reawakening of any too poignant regrets. It is true that as she entered the little station a sudden throb went through her heart; for she could not but remember the terrible day on which she had come up hither—a

pale, trembling ghost of a creature—to see the black train thunder away into the mist. The mere sight of those long, empty lines of rail seemed to make her shiver. But that was a long time ago now; and here was Agnes, very officious with her last little kindnesses; and joyful anticipation, not the recalling of by-gone anguish, was the natural mood for a traveller about to enter upon a long and pleasant holiday.

Moreover, this was a singularly clear and cheerful morning that was greeting her setting out, when once she had got entirely away from the dark and poisoned region surrounding Kirk o' Shields. She saw the sky again—a wonderful thing, far-reaching, with soft white clouds in it that hardly stirred. The air was sweet that came in at the carriage-window. And the farther and farther northward that she got, the more and more beautiful became her surroundings. The sun lay warm on the wide meadows through which the Forth winds its silver way; the gray battlements of Stirling Castle rose far into the blue. The rugged chasm of the Pass of Leny was hanging in rich summer foliage; a thousand million diamonds flashed on the rippling waters of Loch Lubnaig. And then she got away up into wilder regions—into the solitudes of Glen Ogle and Glen Dochart: but the mountains had nothing forbidding about them on this beautiful morning—there was a velvet softness in the shadows even where a

towering peak grew dark under a passing cloud, while for the most part the lower slopes and shoulders were dappled yellow with sunlight. And then again, as she was nearing Tyndrum, she grew still more curiously interested in these outward things; and her heart, in a sort of laughing mood, began to amuse itself with a wild impossibility. For it was at Tyndrum station that Captain Ludovick had made his appearance—having come down through the Black Mount forest to intercept her on her southward journey; and might he not be here to meet her now? She assured herself that she would welcome him gladly, even joyously; there would be no embarrassment at all; she would call him “Ludovick,” and take his hand, and know that he had not forgotten her. She could not understand how the thought of meeting him had alarmed her. Here she had no fear. In a few minutes she would look out of the carriage-window; she would call to him “Ludovick!—Ludovick!” she could see the flash of recognition in his eyes, his quick step forward, and his opening the carriage-door. Sister-like, she would be as kind to him as she could; and they would go through the remaining stages of the journey in great comfort and happiness; and he would tell her all about Hugh and Flora and the rest of them—while Loch Awe and gray Kilchurn went by, and the Pass of Brander, and the hills of Benderloch, until a sweep of Loch Etive brought them

in sight of Morven and Mull, and the mountains that guard the blue western seas.

But even as the train slowed into the little station she knew that all this was entirely impossible; and it was merely to indulge a whimsical fancy that she affected to look out for some one; and when the train had moved on again, and she had resumed her solitary seat, she could hardly say she was disappointed. For well she was aware why it was that Ludovick Macdonell had been so sparing of his references to herself in these letters from abroad; and why he had scrupulously refrained from trying to reopen any communication with her. It was his quick sense of courtesy and of consideration towards her that restrained him. He would not weary her with his importunity. Everything should be as she wished. And when she told him that she was tied hand and foot by reasons and circumstances that she could not explain and that he could not understand, he was bound to believe her, and to take her no as meaning no. And well she knew that in accepting Aunt Gilchrist's invitation to go to the Highlands, she was not in danger of encountering any distressing persecution on his part.

At the same time, when she got to the end of her railway-journey, and found Hugh and Flora awaiting her, she was a little surprised, not perhaps to find that Captain Ludovick was not with them, but that they

did not refer to his absence. They said nothing about him, in fact, even when they were comfortably settled on board the *Mountaineer*, and had plenty of time for rapid questions and answers. And then again, as the steamer moved away from Oban harbor, Alison was keenly interested in all the objects around her; for these seemed so strangely different from the memories of them with which she had beguiled the dark hours of the winter. Everything was so extraordinarily vivid. The air seemed full of light. To Hugh and Flora doubtless these were familiar features—the pretty little bay, all of a trembling blue, save where the sunlight blazed and shimmered on the ripples—Kerrara, with its slopes of green and points of weeded rock—the long spur of Lismore ending in the small gray lighthouse—the far mountains of Mull and Morven, clear to the top, the clefts and scars on their vast brown shoulders traced in lines of the purest, most delicate azure—all this was familiar enough to them; but it was not at all familiar to her. The world seemed so beautiful!—so surpassingly brilliant—and yet so peaceful and calm and still. It appeared to her that in leaving Kirk o' Shields she had come out of a long and sombre night, and got into the white day again; and that her eyes were naturally bewildered by the overpowering radiance around her. The phantom pictures of her winter dreams had fled: this was the living

world, filled with sunlight, the wide skies all open, the wide seas all trembling in that lustrous blue, a gladness everywhere! They could not get her to go below for lunch. She would not go. So Hugh had to take Flora down, and see that she was provided for; but instantly he was up again, and sitting beside this pretty, pale-complexioned, gray-eyed cousin from the south. He lit a cigarette (a newly acquired habit for him) and did not talk much to her; for he could see that she was occupied—and more than content.

Flora came on deck again, and the general conversation was resumed—about Aunt Gilchrist's newly developed passion for the game of poker, about the last exploits of the boy John, about the big takes of bream they had been getting on recent evenings, and so forth; but never a word was said about Ludovick Macdonell. Yet here was Appin; and vividly enough, as the boat slowed into the pier, could Alison recall the broad-shouldered, slim-built young fellow, with the laughing eyes, and clear, sunburnt complexion, whom she had seen come down with his long swinging pace to the steamer. There was no Captain Ludovick at Appin pier now; perhaps he was not even in Lochaber; perhaps he had got that appointment, and had remained in India. And so the *Mountaineer* went on again, through the fair and shining day. Up here Loch Linnhe lay in a dead calm—long swathes of white and

blue without a ripple anywhere; there was no stirring of wind; even the rugged and lonely hills of Kingairloch, that usually are dark and purple-stained, showed their slopes of red granite and gray schist through a faint haze of summer heat, and were grown quite ethereal in hue. As the steamer cleft its way through the still water a school of porpoises took it into their heads to race her; and ever and anon a dorsal fin would appear on the calm surface, gleaming for an instant in the sunlight as the oily-looking fish rolled over. The very quietude of the scene around them seemed to moderate the garrulity of the cousins; Hugh lit another cigarette and began to walk up and down the deck; Flora leaned her two hands on the gunwale, and her chin on her hands, to look abroad over that shining breadth of sea; while Alison watched the slow passing by of the successive bays, the rocky shores, the upward-sloping plantations, the barer summits of the hills receding into the almost cloudless sky. There was but little talking; anyhow Ludovick Macdonell's name was not even mentioned.

And then at last they came in sight of the southern outskirts of Fort William—little white dots of houses among the trees, with pleasant green slopes rising behind them, and the vast bulk of Ben Nevis, seamed and scarred, towering far behind. Those pretty little villas set among gardens had a smiling and cheerful appear-

ance as they were brought closer and closer; and Alison jumped to her feet to respond, when she perceived that from certain windows a welcome was being waved to her. She knew the house well, and her heart warmed towards it. How often had she not sat and dreamed of it—in the drear winter nights of Kirk o' Shields, in the hushed parlor, with every soul in the house bent over a pious book—dreamed of it and of all the kindness and new wonderful experiences connected with it. As she waved her handkerchief to those unseen friends, her eyes were moist. Indeed they had been kind to her, in their robust, happy-go-lucky fashion.

And here, awaiting their arrival, was the lad John. But John was in an exceedingly bad temper. There had come down to the quay a band of itinerant musicians, who were going away by the steamer; and they had been utilizing their time of waiting by playing a series of loud and lively strains, which, instead of having any mollifying effect upon John, only irritated him, for he was bent on business. And not only that, but even as he was conveying Alison's things ashore, she following him, one of these musicians had the effrontery to come up cap in hand to the newly landed party, whereupon John interposed angrily.

"Oh, go aweh hom!" he said, with crushing scorn. "Go aweh hom! Your noise gives me a sore head. I would sooner hear a bull roaring than you and your

noise!" And with that he seized the shafts of his barrow and manfully set forth—to display to the world the difference between a person who could do honest work and an idle, useless, strolling vagabond.

Aunt Gilchrist was seated in the front garden—amid a brave show of roses red and white, of pansies pale yellow and deep purple, of sweet-william of every shade, of nasturtiums, and pheasant's-eyes, and double-poppies; and she herself was just as bright and pleasant to look at as any of them. Her welcome of her bit lady was of the warmest.

"Yes, my dear," said she, and she took the girl's hand in hers, and patted it affectionately, "this is something like the kind of place for you and me to be together. I tell you I'll never go to yon town again. I never will, Alison. You'll have to come to see me. Do ye remember that dreadfu' night—wi' yon great, big, jaundiced-faced baboon o' an elder maundering away about synods, and assemblies, and sederunts?—mercy o' me!"

"But no doubt it was interesting to him, aunt," said Alison, with a smile.

"Interesting! I'll not believe it. I'll not believe a word of it. It was done just for the pleasure of hearing his own continuous gabble and gabble, like a burst rain-pipe on a pouring day. What I should have done but for that comforting drop o' port-wine negus—"

"How is your neuralgia, aunt?" Alison asked.

The little old dame held up a warning finger.

"Whish! Alison," she said, in a whisper. "Periphery's lying quiet just now; we'll no waken him. I've a kind o' feeling in the left side o' my foot that I don't entirely like. I'm afraid Periphery's no quite driven out o' the house yet; he's lying asleep in the cellar, as ye may call it; but as long as he doesna get up and begin to stamp about, we'll just say nothing."

"And are you still taking your port-wine negus?" Alison asked.

"What's that got to do with it?" the old lady retorted, with some sharpness. "Are you setting up to be a doctor too? Are you going to begin to blether about bromides and iodides? I tell ye, ye may fill yourself wi' drugs from week's end to week's end, and ye may dance about from one Hydropathic to another from January to December; and Periphery 'll just laugh at you, and have as firm a grip o' ye as ever; but if ye can coax the bit chappie to lie quiet, by paying no heed to him at all, and doing nothing to stir him up, then ye've got a chance of getting something like peace and comfort."

"But I suppose you can walk well enough, aunt?" Alison proceeded to ask.

"H'm!" said Aunt Gilchrist, doubtfully. "I can walk. Oh, yes, I can walk. But I cannot say that I am very

eager about walking. It's a fine thing to let sleeping dogs lie."

And then again Aunt Gilchrist said,

"Well, I suppose ye've kept your word, my dear. I never got that line ye promised to send me if they began to drive ye into marrying that poor, shambling, shauchly windlestrae o' a creature; so I supposed that smirking mother o' his was letting ye alone—"

"But what's that, aunt?" Flora cried, interposing. "Is Alison going to be married—and to somebody we don't know? Why didn't you say anything about it?" Then she turned to Alison, with a curious look in her face. "Is it true, Alison? Are you going to be married?"

"Perhaps I'd better wait until I'm asked," Alison answered, with reasonable modesty.

"Come away now," Aunt Gilchrist said, taking the girl's arm. "Come away into the house. That's a secret between you and me, Alison. When the time comes, I'll tell them all about the stickit Minister. Oh, ay, *when the time comes!*" She laughed quite gayly. "'Deed, that was a fine plot for me to discover; and if I hadna discovered it, I don't know what might not have happened; for you're just that wilful and perverse, you stiff-necked little Puritan! And you were very near quarrelling wi' me, too. Quarrelling wi' me! —I like your impudence!"

"Well, it isn't easy quarrelling with you, aunt," Alison said, "unless when Periphery has wakened up."

"Whish, I tell you, whish!" the old lady said, in a peremptory whisper; and then they all went into the house, where the Doctor's wife was waiting for them at the tea-table.

Now Aunt Gilchrist was a considerate person; she knew that young people like to be by themselves at times; so presently she had ordered off the three cousins to find amusement for the afternoon, until the evening should summon them to supper and her favorite game of cards. At first there was a talk of getting sea-lines and going after the bream; but Flora interposed.

"Of course," said she, laughing, "Alison will go if you ask her. But she'll just hate it all the time. She's always so neat and trim; and she can't bear getting her fingers and her cuffs wet—"

"What is far more horrid," Alison herself said, "is the flopping of the fish in the bottom of the boat—near your dress: they seem to come alive again when you least expect it—"

"Very well, let's get out the gig, Flora," was the brother's suggestion, which was instantly adopted. "We'll take Alison for a row; and she can steer. The oars are in the gig, so we can get off at once."

And thus it was that Alison speedily found herself in command of the long and shapely boat, with her

two cousins leisurely pulling a slow and measured stroke, out into the glassy plain. The warm afternoon sunshine was now streaming along Loch Linnhe, lighting up the bracken-covered knolls, the grassy slopes of the hills, and the green and yellow patches of the crofts along the shore; while the sea was so still that the shining spars of the yachts sent down reflections unbroken by any line or ripple. There was no particular designation before these voyagers. They went this way and that, exploring the shores of the loch; the rowers rowing with idle but regular stroke; Alison seeming to drink in the joy and calm and beautiful color all around her. Evening found them up at the mouth of Loch Eil; and now, while the western hills were darkening in shades of softest olive-green, the sea around them was a plain of burnished gold and pale rose-purple. A small boat crossing that golden plain was itself of jet-black, and as it went on its way it left behind it two long divergent lines of lilac, like the attenuated wings of an insect. When the cousins rested from their rowing, the silence around them was so intense that they could hear the sound of voices coming across from the Corpach shore. This was not like Kirk o' Shields.

On their way home to Fort William, Alison took Flora's oar, and Flora went to the tiller; and sometimes these two were chatting to each other; and sometimes they could hear Hugh humming the old Gaelic air that

is known as "The Cowboy;" or perhaps Flora, in a pause of silence, would sing to herself, but with no great sadness, a verse of "The Lowlands o' Holland"—

"The love that I had chosen,
Was to my heart's content;
The saut sea will be frozen
Before that I repent;
Repent it will I never
Until the day I dee,
Though the Lowlands o' Holland
Hae twined* my love and me."

By the time they had leisurely got back to Fort William the evening was well on; but the darkness it had brought with it was confined to the massive bulk of the hills along the opposite shore; overhead there was a clear and luminous sky, with a few purple and orange-fringed clouds; while the loch around them had become of a trembling silver-gray, for a slight wind had arisen, and the glassy surface was gone.

And it was still in a beautiful lambent twilight that they had supper, and thereafter took to cards—in a room fronting the west. This was a very unscientific game of poker that Alison was now called upon to witness. Aunt Gilchrist's chief aim seemed to be to engage in a battle-royal with her brother the Doctor;

* *Twined*—severed.

and when these two combatants closed, the others having given up, the fun waxed fast and furious. For the Doctor knew but little of the game; and in his perplexity he invariably consulted his wife, who knew less, but was ever good-humoredly ready with her advice. These consultations, however, were innocently out-spoken and above-board; so that Aunt Gilchrist could easily guess at what was in her opponent's hand; and again and again her shrill laugh of triumph rang out as she swept in the coppers from before the angry Doctor's nose. It was a very frank and honest game of poker that was played by the simple folk; and as the "ante" was one half-penny, and the limit of betting threepence, there was no deadly destruction dealt to anybody.

It was during the progress of this happy-go-lucky game, however, that Alison incidentally made a notable discovery. Flora had adventured upon a bold piece of bluffing—a dangerous experiment for any one with such an expressive face, and such merry, conscious, telltale eyes; the Doctor, at the instigation of his wife, refused to be intimidated; the young lady was "called," and found to be queen high, and the pool was raked in.

"Ah, you thought you were playing with Ludovick, did you!" her brother said, scornfully. "When she's playing against Ludovick she bluffs like the very mischief, for he always gives up. That's not the game at all! If he held four aces, he'd pretend he was afraid of her,

and put in his cards. The other night it was quite ridiculous; I'm certain he was only pretending he held bad hands."

"Wait a little while, Hugh," his mother said, with a quiet smile. "You may find yourself just as willing as any other young man to lose at cards when you want to make yourself agreeable."

"What stuff all that is, unless the girl's a fool!" Master Hugh retorted. "To be flattered by being allowed to win at cards! Besides, it's spoiling the game for other people."

As fresh hands were being dealt, nothing further was said on the subject; but this brief conversation had revealed to Alison not only that Ludovick Macdonell was in his own country, but that he had been in this very house a night or two before. And for a moment her surprise that he had not come to see her on her arrival was accompanied by a sudden fear that she had offended him somehow. It was but for a moment. Perhaps in Kirk o' Shields, sitting alone with her silent reveries, she might have alarmed herself with some such surmise, and tortured herself over it, and longed for some explanation. But here, among these simple, good-natured, well-contented folk, amid this babblement of laughter and harmless wrangling, she dismissed it forthwith. Ludovick was her friend: she need not mistrust him. He would tell her why it was he had not come

to welcome her. Or rather, was not the reason sufficiently apparent? He did not want to embarrass her. It was consideration for her that kept him away—even as it was a kind of delicacy on the part of her cousins that bade them refrain from speaking of him to her. But he would make his appearance in good time, when there was no risk of embarrassment. All things were well. She felt herself very happy and safe in this little dining-room, among these kind folk. And Ludovick would be coming to see her one of these days; and she thought she would be able to give him a more frank and friendly greeting now. There was nothing to frighten her, here in Lochaber. Indeed, she would try to make up to him for any restraint of manner she might have shown in Kirk o' Shields. Amid the noise of this most unscientific game she sate and looked on; but she saw Ludovick Macdonell coming forward to meet her—it might be in this very room—it might be on the white roadway outside—but in his eyes there was the pleasant smile that she knew of old; and this time she would *not* withhold her hand.

And some such vision was still before her, long after the noise of the poker-party had ceased, and long after the house had sunk into profound silence and slumber. She was now in her own room, seated at the window, breathing the soft cool air that floated up from the shore, and watching the mysterious pallid glow in

the sky and on the wide water—that no-man's-land of twilight that in these regions lies between the lingering evening and the coming of the dawn. The hills on the other side of the loch had slowly wrapped themselves in impenetrable gloom—no single feature of rock or tree visible—the deep olive-green grown so dark as to be almost indistinguishable; but over them the heavens were of clear and pearly gray, with one or two clouds, of softest purple, hanging motionless there; while the sleeping loch was of a wan and livid blue, with the various boats and yachts, lying on that still surface, appearing so strangely vivid that they seemed to have been carved out of jet. Not a leaf stirred in the garden; not a ripple whispered along the sea-weed fringe of the beach. Far into the night she sate, half dreaming but wholly satisfied and content; for she was in the enchanted land again; her heart was full of peace—as serene and full of peace as this wide, silent, beautiful world out there; and she had assured herself that all was well.

CHAPTER III.

AN EXPEDITION.

WHEN Alison looked out next morning she observed the boy Johnny engaged in raking smooth the gravel-path; and she was pleased to see him thus industriously occupied; and hoped that he had abandoned the inveterate indolence which used to possess him. And it seemed hard that just at this moment three graceless loons, coming along from the town, should set to work to jeer at John. What offence, if any, he had given them, she could not make out—partly because her window was shut, and partly because the altercation, insulting on the one side, and scornful on the other, was carried on in Gaelic. It ended by the three of them making derisive gestures with their fingers, the further to exasperate Johnny; and then—the tallest of the lads having picked up a clod of earth and flung it at him by way of playful farewell—the idle vagabonds went on.

Johnny regarded his retreating foes with a gloomy deliberation. They did not wholly disappear. Alison could see them indulging in all kinds of horse-play

farther along the road; then they went down to the edge of the loch and began to throw stones at a bit of floating wood. At the same moment she saw John put aside his rake and come back to the house; and as she judged that he had resolved to treat these tomfools with proper contempt, by paying no more heed to them, she turned to look at the beds of yellow pansies, and the masses of orange nasturtiums, and the blue lobelia borders, which were all very bright and cheerful in the morning sunlight.

But presently Johnny reappeared; and she perceived that he had in his hand an old straw hat. This he left at the gate; and then—with a furtive look in the direction of his enemies—he stole across the road, went down the beach, picked up a large stone, and quickly returned. He then took that battered old straw hat, and placed it in the middle of the highway—but with the big stone carefully concealed inside. That done, he came back to the garden, shut the gate, and locked it, and took up a place of observation behind a couple of fuchsia-bushes, where he could see without easily being seen.

Johnny's dark and subtle anticipations proved correct—his enemies were not going far; very soon they were perceived to be returning along the road, with all kinds of gambolling and boisterous nonsense. But no sooner did they notice the old hat lying there than they simulta-

neously made a rush for it, struggling and hauling at each other as to which should have the first kick. By this time Johnny had thrown himself prone on his face, just behind the little parapet of stone supporting the railings which were the garden frontage, where also was a row of fuchsia-bushes. He could hear, but he could not see; neither could he be seen—except by Alison, who was a spectator of the whole performance. It was the tallest of the lads—he who had thrown the clod of earth at Johnny—who managed to shake off his two companions, and secure the coveted first kick. He came on with a rush; then there was a crack! but instead of the tattered hat flying into the air, behold! a big stone rolled away along the road, while the enraged and astonished youth caught up his leg with both hands, and clinched his teeth outside his underlip in a manner betokening extreme dissatisfaction. Even through the shut window Alison could hear the roars of derision set up by his companions; and she could see that Johnny, lying snug behind the fuchsia-bushes, was entirely convulsed with fiendish laughter, rolling and shaking, and digging his elbows into the ground. The injured youth outside regarded the house and its surroundings with malevolent and vindictive eyes; but of course there was no one to be seen. He even limped painfully up to the gate and shook it; and it might have gone hard with Master John if he had been

discovered; but the gate was locked. So there was nothing for that lamed and sobered young man but to hobble away back to Fort William—no doubt delighting his companions with his contortions of pain and his curses and vows of vengeance.

But there was harder work than gravel-raking in store for Master Johnny that day. The three cousins had planned an expedition to a little lake far away among the hills—Flora desirous of getting some water-lilies, and Hugh looking forward to an hour or two's fly-fishing; while upon Johnny devolved the double task of carrying the luncheon-basket and rowing the boat. Alison wanted Aunt Gilchrist to accompany them; but the wild escapades which the little dame had been promising herself were being postponed from day to day, through some uneasy suspicion that Periphery was merely asleep with one eye open. Aunt Gilchrist went with them as far as they could drive; then the wagonette set out for home again, carrying her with it; and the three cousins were left to climb the hill towards this solitary tarn, the faithful Johnny struggling manfully upward with the luncheon-basket on his shoulder.

The morning was singularly bright and breezy—indeed, Flora was much surer of getting her water-lilies than Hugh was of getting any fly-fishing, for the wind was blowing hard and there was an abundant sunlight

everywhere. When at last they came in sight of the little loch there was a picture before them that would have delighted the eye of anybody but an angler. Set in a cup of the hills this small tarn was surrounded by soft green slopes, some of them covered with birch and some with bracken; while along the shores ran a circle of tall rushes that were bending and swaying in successive waves; and then another belt of water-lilies, whose broad leaves were all lifting and flapping in the wind, while the big white stars of flowers moved slowly hither and thither. For there was a brisk gale blowing; and the water of the lake, naturally of a deep brown, was driven into a rich purple-blue, that became quite ruddy in the shallows. Everywhere there was a restless change and movement—a universal shimmering and rustling—the fierce gusts striking down on the marshy banks where the sand-brown grass, the tall loosestrife, and the meadowsweet bent before the blast, and then widening out upon the racing and hurrying waves that dashed with a fringe of white along the leeward shore. It was all very bright and beautiful, no doubt—the keen blue sky overhead, the brilliant sunlight, the purple loch amid those fair green slopes; but there was not much prospect of fly-fishing.

In the mean time Johnny was despatched to the other end of the loch to bring across the boat; and a fine sight it was to see him trying to drive that heavy

craft against wind and water. For a space it would seem as if he were making progress; then one of those black squalls would strike down, tearing the racing waves along with it; and Johnny would come to a sudden stand-still, even when he was not carried to leeward.

"His laziness is having his work cut out for him this time!" Hugh said, grimly, as he watched the spray springing white at the bows of the slow-laboring boat.

"Then why don't you call to him to put back, and you could go and help him?" Alison naturally asked.

"That would be no use—only one can pull in that boat," was the answer. "But a dose of hard work does Johnny a power of good. He thinks over it for days after; and that leaves him less time for plotting mischief."

Nevertheless, the lad John had a heavy pair of shoulders, and eventually he managed to bring the boat along to the broad bed of water-lilies, through which he had to force it by using one of the oars as a pole. When at last he had got the bow securely jammed into the soft bank, he stepped ashore.

"Well, Johnny, is there any wind out there?" Hugh asked him, in playful fashion.

Johnny ruefully looked at the palms of his hands.

"If there wass mich more o' this," said he, "I think

I would need to go to the smiddy, and ask them to mek me a pair of iron hands."

"Why, man, it's fine exercise for you!" his master said.

"I do not know about that," said John, regarding with a kind of sullen reproach the farther end of the loch and the lashing waves, "but I know this, that if you wass down yonder you would think the Duffle himself was in the water, and trying to drive the boat ashore."

Indeed, from the comparative calm that prevailed here among the rushes and lilies it was impossible for any one to judge of the force of wind and water farther out—as the three cousins were presently to discover. For as soon as Hugh had got his tackle ready they all embarked, and slowly pushed their way through the tangled mass of stems and broad leaves. This was all very well, and Hugh had even begun to cast, when it was found that the boat was beginning to drift down the loch with a marvellous rapidity. As they had neither an anchor nor a bit of rope, their only resource was to get Johnny to pull against the wind; but perhaps Johnny's previous struggle had exhausted him; or perhaps he was beginning to think he had had enough of this useless labor: anyhow, the boat kept drifting over Hugh's flies, which he could only recover in a helpless manner.

"Pull harder, Johnny!" the impatient fisherman cried. "Don't let the boat drift so fast."

Thereupon John made a further pretence of pulling very hard indeed; but still the boat was careering down the wind, and getting momentarily into rougher water.

"How do you like this, John?" Alison inquired, with a gentle smile.

"I wish I wass in my bed sleeping," Johnny answered, gloomily, as he labored away at the cumbrous oars.

"Sleeping in the middle of the day?" she asked.

"Well, sleeping is better for you than rowing, at any time," he answered, sullenly.

But perhaps this discontent of John's was in a measure affected—just as there was a good deal of pretence about his hard rowing—for presently he was heard to say,

"Cosh, I think this is the loch where the Duffle comes up to get a drink; and when he finds a boat on it, he's angry, and he shoves her about below. I would need a pair of iron shoulders as well as iron hands to pull a boat on this loch!"

Whatever the matter was, it was clear that Johnny could not hold his own against the gale; fishing was out of the question; and they had only now to consider where they could let themselves be driven ashore

without getting wet with spray. Fortunately they espied a little bay that was partly sheltered by its abundance of rushes; and here the boat was run in out of the tempest, and securely fastened to the bank. Hugh took out his fly-book and began to go over the leaves in idle thought; the girls went away to gather an armful of meadowsweet for home decoration; and John, sitting on the gunwale of the boat, morosely gazed out upon the loch that had given him such a dose of hard work, and all for nothing.

Presently Flora called aloud,

“Hugh, isn’t that Ludovick away over yonder?”

They could make out the figure of some one crossing a distant bracken-covered ridge.

“Very likely,” was the answer.

Flora turned to Alison with an air of studied indifference.

“I think it very likely too. He knew we were coming to this loch to-day. And somehow all our expeditions get mismanaged when Ludovick isn’t with us. You’ll see he’ll be able to do something for us.”

Alison heard, but did not answer; she was a little tremulous and breathless; she dared not raise her eyes. And yet this was not fear that filled her heart—not fear at all, but rather a kind of gladness and joyful anticipation. With all this brilliant, blowing day around her, with these pleasant companions, and with Ludovick

himself coming in this casual fashion to see what they were after, there seemed no occasion for any hesitating doubts or fears. She was ready to welcome him; she hoped he would think her welcome of him friendly. And if she did not care to watch that solitary figure coming across the slopes of heather and bracken (for Flora was standing by), she seemed to know well enough that this was Captain Ludovick, and that presently the little party of four would be together again, just as in the olden, never-to-be-forgotten days.

"Yes, it's Ludovick: let's go back to the boat," Flora said; and back to the boat they went, to deposit their wild-flowers there, while the new-comer's long, swinging stride was bringing him rapidly towards them.

"How do you do, Miss Alison? I'm glad to see you back again in Lochaber," he said, in a very pleasant and friendly way; but his eyes did not rest on her more than a second; he immediately turned to Hugh and Flora.

A chill of disappointment struck home to her heart. Was this the long-expected meeting, then? Was this his welcome of her—this couple of half-indifferent phrases, and hardly a single glance? He had given her no opportunity of showing that she wished to be kind to him—that she had no fear now—that she claimed the

friendship he had promised. He was talking to Hugh; and Hugh was explaining that Johnny could not hold the boat against the wind, so that the fishing had scarcely been tried.

"Oh, as for that," Macdonell said, promptly, "I'll pull the boat for you. I don't know that it will be of much use—the fish won't rise in squally weather like this. However, you may as well try it, now you're here; and if you put on a big fly we'll troll up the middle of the loch, and then you can put on your other flies again and we'll drift down the side."

"But, Ludovick," said Flora, "Alison and I may as well stop ashore, and there'll be less weight in the boat."

"Not at all!" he protested. "You come and see the fun—you never know what may happen. But Johnny can stop ashore."

"Johnny will not be sorry," said Miss Flora, with a pleasant smile.

"No, I will not be sorry," Johnny said, mostly to himself, in answer to her sarcasm—and he was sullenly looking out on the dark and driven water. "It is no use trying the fishing. The Duffle is in that loch; and the fish are all aweh hom."

Despite this evil augury, the four companions got into the boat, and presently they were making their

way through the rushes out into the open loch. And very soon it appeared that this new gillie was of a much more powerful build than his predecessor—though he seemed to set about his self-imposed duties in a very free and easy manner. Notwithstanding that the waves were striking heavily at the bows, and that those black squalls came whirling along every minute or two, he managed to keep a fairly steady way on the boat, and apparently without much trouble to himself; and if they could not induce a fish to follow the trailing fly, at least they succeeded in getting up to the head of the loch, where the drifting was to begin. And in this drifting, too, it seemed quite easy for him to hold the boat just as he wished, so that Hugh industriously fished all down the one side of the loch—not casting, but merely lifting the flies so that the wind carried them out. But their conjoint labor was of no avail. The trout would not rise. The squalls and heavy water had frightened them, and they had gone below, or into the safety of the reeds. So there was nothing for it but to run the boat once more into that sheltered little bay—and to get forth the luncheon-basket.

Now, this ought to have been a very pleasant little luncheon-party, in this snug retreat; and Flora and Hugh were merry enough; but Alison could not help being a little surprised and hurt by the distant courtesy with which Captain Ludovick appeared to treat her. She

felt that she was not on the same footing with him as were Flora and Hugh. All his laughing stories were told to them. He rarely addressed her, except when civility demanded; still more rarely did their eyes meet. Did he want to punish her, then, for her refusal? Or did this coldness arise from an excess of courtesy—from his determination that no revival of his former attentions should embarrass her? Anyhow, it seemed hard that she should be thus left out, in however indefinable a way.

In the afternoon, however, an incident occurred that for a time at least interrupted these strained and formal relations. Having waited in vain for the wind to lessen, they thought they would give the loch one more trial before going home; and as before, Ludovick Macdonell offered his services as gillie. They had got up to the head of the loch, and were drifting down before the squally breeze, when Hugh, noticing that his flies had not fallen quite straight, unthinkingly twitched them out of the water to make an ordinary cast over his shoulder. To have done this successfully, with these heavy gusts blowing, would have demanded some little exercise of strength and also of dexterity; but, as it was, this careless backward cast did not get the line out at all—in fact, it was blown down in a heap upon the boat and its occupants. At the same instant Alison

uttered a brief quick cry of pain; instinctively she covered her eye with her hand; and Hugh, wheeling round in dismay, perceived where one of his flies had caught. His face turned deadly white—far whiter than hers, indeed—and he was quite paralyzed with fear: it was Ludovick Macdonell who took Alison's hand and gently removed it.

"You must let me look," he said to her, and he held her hand lest she should put it back. To his great relief he found that the hook had not entered the eye; but it had caught the edge of the under eyelid, and was lightly fixed there.

"Tell Hugh not to mind," was the first thing she said—as if she were already blind, and speaking of some distant person whom she could not see.

"But you needn't be frightened, Alison," Ludovick said to her, with eager assurance, though he himself was in considerable doubt as to what should be done. "The hook is not in your eye, it has only caught the eyelid. Hugh, have you got a pair of scissors in your fly-book?"

It was with trembling fingers that the wretched lad got out the pair of scissors, and handed them to Macdonell, who as a preliminary measure snipped the casting-line close to the fly. Then he said to her,

"Look here, Alison, I believe I could take it out myself, now, and without hurting you much, if you cared to run the risk; but perhaps it will be safer to wait until we get back to Fort William, and then the Doctor can make certain of it."

"I would rather you would take it out," she said, calmly enough.

"No, Alison, no!" Flora entreated. "Don't run any risk! Wait till we get home!"

"It would be safer," Captain Ludovick said—but he was still addressing Alison, "except for this—that the hook might work itself farther in."

"I would like you to take it out now, if you would be so kind," she said to him, simply.

"Well, if you like to trust me—but it will hurt a little," he said.

"I don't mind that," she answered.

And still he hesitated; for it was something of a responsibility; besides, he did not know how much pain he might inflict—and how much more gladly would he have borne it himself!

"I would rather cut it out of my own finger," he said, "even if it was in both barb and shank. Are you quite sure you won't draw back your head when you find me take hold of the hook?"

"I shall not move."

For safety's sake he put one hand on her shoulder; but she was firm enough; she did not flinch a hair's-breadth even when she felt him cautiously take hold of the hook.

"Are you ready, Alison?"

"Yes."

"Quite?"

"Quite."

Then there was a quick little jerk. She uttered no cry; she merely kept her eyes closed until Flora called to her joyously.

"Alison, it's all right! Ludovick has got it out!—it's all right, isn't it?"

The girl opened her eyes, which were moist with the pain caused by that sudden twitch; but even through these involuntary tears she could smile her thanks to the operator—and her eyes were expressive enough when she chose.

"I hope I didn't hurt you much," said he, "but really it was better to get it out at once: you've no idea how horrid a thing it is to cut a hook out, when once the barb has got right in. Take your handkerchief now, Alison, and dip it in the water, and bathe your eye a little. Why, there's hardly a speck—just the smallest bit of skin torn away. I wish I had a looking-glass of some kind."

"Why?" she asked.

He smiled a little—indeed he seemed quite gratified over the success of his experiment, and was talking at random and carelessly now.

"Well, it was this way: I was living in a rather dilapidated shooting-lodge up in Ross-shire, and one evening the ceiling of the kitchen fell in. There was a mighty noise; and of course we all rushed to the place, and there we found that the plaster had knocked down a young servant-girl who happened to be there, and she was lying senseless—though it turned out she was more frightened than hurt. I noticed this, though, that when everything was being done to reassure the unfortunate creature after she came to, the old house-keeper did best of all—she ran away and got a hand-glass, and made the girl look in it to convince herself that she was not disfigured in any way. I thought the old woman had some knowledge of human nature."

"Then I will be your hand-glass, Alison!" Flora cried, quite joyfully. "And I declare to you that there's nothing but a small pink scratch—oh, hardly bigger than a pin's head! Disfigurement? Nothing of the kind. And you're looking just as nice and trim and provokingly neat as ever, if that is any comfort to you!"

Alison laughed a little; but there was still gratitude

in her eyes as she obeyed Ludovick's directions as to the use of the wet handkerchief.

This was the end of the fishing, or attempted fishing—indeed, the boat had meanwhile drifted down and imbedded itself in a mass of water-lilies; so they got ashore and prepared for their march down through the hills to the spot where the wagonette was awaiting them. Hugh was deeply mortified and apologetic; again and again he returned to the subject, upbraiding his own stupidity, until Alison had seriously to ask him what it was she had suffered. But he was not to be comforted; and when everything was ready he walked off by himself, and would have gone on by himself, only that Flora hastened to overtake him, and give him of her sisterly sympathy and remonstrance. The consequence of this arrangement was that Captain Ludovick and Alison brought up the rear by themselves, for the boy John had gone forward some time before with the luncheon-basket.

And then Alison took heart of grace.

"I don't think you were very friendly with me this morning," she said, with her eyes cast down.

He seemed a little surprised.

"I hope I was not unfriendly," he said. "But—but I thought it was better that I should let you un-

derstand that I did not mean to harass you—or—or vex you.”

“You promised that we were to be firm and fast friends,” she said, a little proudly.

“Yes?” he said.

“And yet you called me ‘Miss Alison’ all the morning—until you had to take the hook out of my eyelid,” she continued, with growing confidence—for it seemed so easy and natural to talk to him here: she was quite resolved on having a thorough understanding with him, if he wished it also.

“Do you think I like to call you ‘Miss’ Alison?” he responded. “No, I don’t. I think of you as Alison; and I suppose I might as well say it. But I did not wish to embarrass you.”

“Well, you wouldn’t embarrass me by calling me Alison,” she said, as they walked on together.

“It will be a great deal more pleasant for me,” he made answer again. “Mind you, I want to be to you, now and always, just what you wish me to be. You gave me your last word, and I accepted it; and my mouth is shut—until—well, I am not going to risk anything by speaking. Let our friendship be as close and firm and fast as it can be. But I wonder if you would be offended, Alison, if I told you something about yourself?”

She raised her eyes, and met his bravely.

"Offended? I am sure *not*," she said.

"Well, then," said he, with a trace of shyness that rather became him, "I can't help thinking that you are a far more human kind of a being when you are in the Highlands; and sometimes I can't help thinking of what might happen if only you were always living among us."

CHAPTER IV.

PRINCESS DEIRDRI.

THAT, at all events, she was a very different kind of being up in these regions was very well known to herself; for whether it was the fresh air and exercise, or the cheerful society and constant occupation, or the delight of looking at the beautiful things surrounding her, or all of these combined, certain it is that all the day long a sort of elation seemed to thrill through her to the very finger-tips. Every moment was full of life. Even when she was away alone—up among the hills whither she used to climb in order to have a view of the wider waters in the south—there was no sadness in her mind, but rather a sense of jubilation, and thankfulness, and content with all the world. The wildest days of gloom, so far from having any terror for her, exercised over her a singular fascination; she rejoiced in the foreboding of the storm; she welcomed the coming of this terrible unknown thing that darkened the heavens and the earth. For what might not these sombre mountains bring forth—the great masses of them

in communion with the lowering clouds, and here and there retreating behind a mystic veil of rain? The driven sea—its lurid green broken by white flashes of foam—and the wind that tore by her in sudden gusts and squalls seemed awful and threatening; and yet she had no fear of them; rather they made her strong to withstand, and defiant, and even proud of their angry and vengeful look. Then, sometimes, a soft sun-touched hill-side would slowly emerge from behind those gray mists of showers, and a rainbow would declare itself against the purple masses of the clouds; and here and there the running sea would be struck a vivid green by following shafts of light. And then all this changing phantasmagoria was quite near to her; not remote and passively picturesque like the views of Switzerland she had seen, but quite close around her, and she part of them, and mysteriously associated with them, a child of the universe like themselves. No, even in these wild days of storm and tempest she had no fear; these winds and clouds and sun-swept seas were friendly things; she loved to be alone with them, and listen to their strange, uncertain voices. Sometimes she wondered whether they understood her, and her presence there, any better than she understood them.

And the glooms and terrors and anxious perplexities of Kirk o' Shields? She had forgotten them. She had forgotten that Ludovick Macdonell was a Roman Ca-

tholic, a dangerous person, in league with priests and persecutors, a worshipper of the scarlet woman, the woman drunken with the blood of the Saints. She was too light-hearted and busy to think of such things; the present moment was full of gladness and occupation; when she looked in his face, and met his frank and pleasant smile, she did not remember anything about the scarlet woman and the beast that came out of the bottomless pit. When he was walking by her side along the shores of Loch Linnhe, or telling her stories in the stern of Hugh's lug-sail boat, or giving her a hand at the steep places of the hill-side, why, he was just Ludovick!—and she did not bother her head about anything else. And it must be said that the companionship of these two had become a very pronounced and notorious thing. They made no kind of concealment about it—Alison least of all. They were continually together, during the long walks and drives, when they went on sailing expeditions, as they sate in the garden on these clear and still summer evenings, or went indoors to see how that mild game of poker was going on. He did not address himself much to her, nor she to him; but somehow they were never very far away from each other; and they seemed entirely satisfied with this half-silent comradeship. It was "Alison" and "Ludovick" now; they were as belonging to the one family, along with Flora and Hugh; and the various

excuses that Captain Ludovick made for coming over from Oyre and planning new excursions were simply innumerable, while even during his brief absences there was always some reminder of his existence and of his remembrance making its way to the house in which Alison lived.

It was altogether a very extraordinary state of affairs. But for the name of the thing, they were to all outward appearance conducting themselves precisely as a pair of affianced lovers, and that without any concealment or embarrassment. Nominally they were merely friends, of course; but this friendship that Alison had boldly claimed, and that Captain Ludovick was in nowise inclined to withhold, seemed to be of an extremely devoted and exclusive kind. And not only did the other members of the household tacitly acquiesce in these relations, but Aunt Gilchrist in especial looked on with open approval. She no longer appeared to regard Captain Macdonell as a possible fortune-hunter. The fact is, she had indignantly resented the insolence, as she deemed it, of the Cowan family in endeavoring to carry away her ward, her especial charge, to marry her to that poor voiceless probationer; and she had given everybody to understand that she, Jane Gilchrist, meant to put her foot down upon that little scheme. She intimated plainly enough that she had already made some kind of settlement upon Alison, and that she had

not the slightest intention of allowing any portion of her money to find its way into the pockets of the 'stickit minister.'

"No, no! Alison, my dear," the old dame said openly. "I'm a wilful woman when I take anything into my head; and I tell ye I'm ready to defy the whole o' that congregation—elders, deacons, precentors, and all the rest of them!"

"Yes, Aunt Gilchrist," Alison said, with a smile, "it's easy to defy them when you don't live among them."

"Ay, is that it?" the old lady said, with a sharp look. "Are ye feared to go back? Well, just tell them that I'll maybe not let ye go back. Tell them I've bought ye for my own. You're nothing but a white slave. And I should not wonder if I did not let ye marry at all."

"I'm sure I don't want to get married, aunt," said Alison, cheerfully; "I am very happy as I am."

"Oh yes," Aunt Gilchrist made answer, half to herself. "They all say that! But it's wonderful how quick they can change their mind when the occasion comes."

Nothing further was said just then, for at this moment Captain Ludovick happened to make his appearance, driving up the wagonette that belonged to Oyre. They were all bound on an expediton into the

Braes of Lochaber—the excuse this time being that the horses at Oyre did not get nearly enough exercise; and as everything was ready, the whole of the party forthwith took their places. By rights Aunt Gilchrist should have been given the post of honor next the driver; but as she declared she preferred going inside, it was remarkable with what equanimity Alison, at Captain Ludovick's suggestion, got up and occupied the seat beside him. After all, she was a kind of stranger and guest; and no doubt Captain Ludovick wanted to point out to her the objects of interest along the road.

It was a pleasant morning for setting out; the distant village of Corpach was shining white among its scattered trees; and the little gray monument to Colonel Cameron of Fassiefern could be seen distinctly enough under the velvet-soft slopes of the hills. They drove out and past the ruins of Inverlochy Castle, that seemed to have grown dark with tradition and tales of strife and slaughter; and by-and-by, when they had got away to the north of Ben Nevis, they entered a wild moorland country—the long, bare undulations bounded by dark green pine-woods, and these again leading the eye up to the loftier hills, that were all picturesquely dappled with sunshine and shadow. This in truth was rather a monotonous highway—its chief feature being the roadside cairns of stones built up where a funeral

procession had rested the coffin on their way to the church-yard in the lonely glen; and perhaps it was the sight of these rude memorials that induced Captain Ludovick to tell his companion the sad story of Princess Deirdri, whose name is supposed to linger in that of the vitrified fort, Dundearduil, in Glen Nevis. The beautiful Irish princess, as some may care to know, was beloved of King Connacher of Ulster, but she would have nothing to do with him, seeing that he was old and ugly, red-haired and squint-eyed, whereupon Connacher shut her up in prison. But there were three young men, nephews of the king, who were sorry for the captive princess; and they succeeded in freeing her, and in escaping along with a party of followers across the seas to the western Highlands, where they settled first of all upon the shores of Loch Etive. Whether Naos, one of the three brothers, and the Princess Deirdri had been in love with each other before they forsook their native country is not stated; however, in this new land they did love each other, and were married, and lived in great happiness. After several years the King of Ulster professed to forgive them, and invited them to go home again; and the Princess Deirdri was against that, having anxious forebodings of treachery; but eventually they persuaded her to go. It was on her voyage across the seas that she composed her lament on leaving the various places

where she had been so happy; and the story tells how all her companions were moved to tears as she sang—

“Glen Etive, O Glen Etive,
There was raised my earliest home,
Beautiful were its woods on rising,
When the sun fell on Glen Etive!

* * * *

Glenorchy, O Glenorchy,
The straight glen of smooth ridges;
No man of his age was so joyful
As my Naos in Glenorchy!

* * * *

Glenmassan, O Glenmassan,
Long its grass, and fair its woodland glades;
All to ourselves was the place of our repose
On grassy Invermassan!”

Deirdri's mournful anticipations proved correct; Connacher, finding her more beautiful than ever, straightway slew her husband, hoping to win her for himself; but the faithful princess did not linger behind—she managed to borrow a knife from a boatman, plunged it into her bosom, and fell dead on her husband's corpse, so that the lovers went together into lands still more unknown than even the far Glen Etive and Lochaber.

Such was the substance of the tale he told her; and then he went on to say,

“I knew of another Princess Deirdri, though when-

ever I think of her I suffer a pretty sharp twinge of remorse. This is how it was. I was once at a small shooting-box right away up in the highest region of the Monaghlea hills—the most lonely and unfrequented place you could imagine—and one morning we were up in the corries driving the woods for black game. The beaters were just getting to the end of a drive, when a young roebuck came flashing out of the bushes and crossed me about thirty yards off—it was an easy shot, and I dropped him. But the next moment I began to wonder at any roe-deer being so high up in the hills, for they generally keep to the woods and glens farther down; so when the keepers came along, I asked them. Then I found out what I had done. Quite early in the summer a young buck and a young doe had come straying up into these wilds, and I suppose they had taken a fancy to the neighborhood, for they remained there, though none of the rest of the herd ever followed them. They had the whole place to themselves, and when the keepers happened to come on them they were always found together, either feeding about among the rocks or lying on the warm heather. This morning the beaters had again stumbled on them; but the doe had doubled back and escaped; it was the young buck that unfortunately came within reach of my gun—and there that idyl ended. I was mighty sorry for it, I can

tell you," he continued, as they were leisurely driving along. "I've often thought of the fine time those two must have had together—for it is a very pretty place up there—lovely little glens, and clear streams, and birch-woods—and all that summer they had the whole district to themselves. And a very handsome young roebuck he was too: I've got his head mounted at Oyre. But I've never shot a roe-deer since."

"And what became of the other one?" Alison asked.

"Well, she was seen about the woods for some little time after, and then she disappeared. I suppose she went back to the herd; and I sometimes wonder whether that Princess Deirdri used to think of the happy days she spent with her Naos up in the Corrie-nan-Shean. I don't like to think of that idyl of the hills—but it has saved the life of many a roebuck since."

Now, the luckless young Irish princess came into their talk still once again that day, and in this wise. They had driven away along Glen Spean (and it was with no little interest that she regarded Keppoch House, for she had come to know a good deal about the Macdonells of Keppoch, and their deeds of other days) until they came to Bridge of Roy; and as this was the end of their drive they stopped at the solitary little inn; the horses were taken out while they went inside to order lunch. But luncheon in the Highlands is not supposed to be complete without boiled potatoes; and

while these were being got ready, Captain Ludovick and Alison went out for a stroll about the place, their wandering footsteps eventually leading them down to the river. They talked of various things, but only now and again, for this companionship of theirs seemed to suffice without any effort at mutual entertainment; and when at length they reached the bridge they paused there, and Alison, the better to look down into the rocky chasm through which the clear brown water flowed, placed both arms on the rude stone parapet, and bent her head over. Nothing was said for some time; she was used to silence, and content with it; it was enough for her that Ludovick was with her.

But presently he took hold of her hand, and she did not withdraw it, as, in their present relations, she ought to have done.

"Alison," said he, "isn't it about time to have done with this make-believe?"

She flushed quickly, and raised her head a little bit, so that she could see his face if she chose.

"What make-believe?" she asked, though well she knew.

"The pretence of being only friends," he answered. "I love you; I think you love me: what is the use of hiding it?"

"What is the use of anything else?" she said, rather wistfully. Then she raised her head somewhat,

and spoke with greater cheerfulness: "Are we not happy enough as we are, Ludovick?"

"As we are!" he exclaimed. "Yes, this is all very well—and it's very pleasant for us to be continually together—but don't you sometimes look forward a little bit? It's very pleasant for me to be seeing you nearly every day, and to be with you for hours and hours at a stretch; but how long will it last? You will be going away. You won't be so happy then, will you? I shall not, I know. And for yourself, Alison, don't you rather think you will be like the Princess Deirdri when she was bidding good-by to all the places she had known; and don't you think you will look back more than once to the days when you and I were together here? But there won't be so much happiness then."

Her eyes were filled with sudden tears; she turned away her head somewhat.

"Indeed I know that," she said, in a low voice that was rather uncertain. "I have—gone through that before."

"Very well," said he, at once, "let us take the other way. What is the use of concealment? There is no use in it any longer. Let me write this very evening to your father, and I will tell him that you and I mean to get married—what can be simpler than that?"

She suddenly rose erect, and faced him with frightened eyes.

"Oh no, I couldn't do that!" she said, breathlessly. "I couldn't, Ludovick!—I—I daren't!"

"Very well," said he, gently. "Perhaps that is too much—too abrupt. But what I want to do is to convince you that you entirely exaggerate the horror which your friends and relatives would exhibit if they were told you were going to marry a Catholic. I don't believe they would show any horror at all. It is the Catholic doctrines and ritual they hold in abhorrence; and they would know well enough that neither would concern you in the least—that you need have nothing to do with either. Then your family have seen me—they know I haven't cloven feet and horns—"

"I did not tell them you were a Catholic, Ludovick," she said, rather ruefully.

"I wish now you had," he made answer. "But never mind. Here is my proposal now. Perhaps making the announcement in that way to your father would be too abrupt. But I want to get you to believe that there will be no such wild dismay as you expect. Very well: write to your sister Agnes, and tell her frankly all about it. Confide in her. You will see what she says; and I am pretty certain it won't alarm you."

She looked up again with more hopefulness in her eyes.

"I thought of it once, Ludovick," she said, rather shyly.

"Do it now, then—this evening," said he. "But then do it the right way. Don't put it before her as if it was some vague proposition that might as well be dismissed, for the better comfort of everybody concerned. Alison," he continued, regarding her, "you will tell her that the relationship between you and me is something beyond recall. It is so, is it not?"

He could hardly hear her answer.

"I—I hope so, Ludovick."

He grasped her hand more tightly than ever.

"Then let this be the first step, my darling; and you will see that your fears will vanish away one by one. You have courage enough for anything—I can see it every day—and why not for this? Come away now—yonder is Flora at the door of the inn, waving a handkerchief for us. And don't you forget to tell everything quite frankly to your sister."

As they were walking back to the inn she looked up to him with a smile.

"Do you know, Ludovick," said she, "that when I am with you, when I hear you talking, I have no fears at all! Everything seems quite simple and easy."

And indeed when they had returned to the inn, and all of them were seated round the table in the little parlor, no one could have imagined from her

manner that any very serious conversation had taken place between these two on Roy Bridge. She was quite animated and cheerful; and submitted to some raillery on the part of Aunt Gilchrist with the greatest of good-humor. It is true that during the long drive home she was somewhat silent; and the moment she entered the house she went to her own room, and remained there for a considerable time. And when she came out again and despatched Johnny to the post-office with the letter she had written, she seemed restless and uneasy; and she even lingered about the front garden, pretending to examine the various shrubs, until he had actually come back again. But when she had ascertained from him that the letter had been definitely and irretrievably posted, her countenance cleared considerably; and, probably to make light of her previous disquietude, she casually asked John whether he had ever been to Bridge of Roy.

"No, mem, it's a long weh from here," said John.

But seeing that Alison did not immediately dismiss him, Johnny made bold to ask her if she had been at the burial-ground that morning when they were up in the Braes.

"What burial-ground, Johnny?" she inquired of him.

"Well, I am not remembering the name of it," said Johnny, after a moment's pause, "but it is up in the hills

whateffer, and many's the time I hef heard of it. The old people used to be buried there for years and years. But what I hef been told is thus," John continued, with a demure twinkle in his eye, "that they were burying a Protestant in that place, where there wass none but Catholics pefore; and ever after that at night there wass a terrible noise of clashing of swords and shields and dirks; and ahl the people living there were frightened to go by that way. Oh, a terrible noise it wass; and when they went to the Free Church minister—well, mebbe he wass not believing the story, but he could do nothing at ahl; and the darker the night the more ahful the clashing and the noise. Cosh, I think the Protestant man was a ferry good fighter, when the whole of them could not put him out! And then it grew to be so bad that they had to send for a Catholic priest; and he brought some holy water with him, and said the prayers over the ground, and now it is ahl quate again. But I know I would not like to be going near that place at night."

"Are you a Protestant or a Catholic, Johnny?" Alison asked, with a kind of new interest.

Johnny looked at her inquiringly for a second.

"What will you be for being yourself, mem?" he said, cautiously.

But this return question was a very shocking thing. It was perfectly obvious that this Laodicean sought to

find out what her faith was merely that he might cheerfully declare himself of the same way of thinking, and she could not countenance any such piece of depravity; so she made some excuse for breaking off the conversation, and departed into the house.

It was a couple of days thereafter that she received the answer to the letter she had sent to Kirk o' Shields. Flora and she had been out driving with Aunt Gilchrist until late in the afternoon (for a wonder, Captain Ludovick was not with them—he had been summoned away on business); and when they returned home they were met by Hugh, who declared that he had been working hard all day, and besought the two girls to go out with him for a row in the gig, for there was a clear evening light shining all around, and the loch was still. Flora good-naturedly acquiesced, and so did Alison; and both of them would have forthwith gone down to the shore, but that Hugh happened to say,

“Oh, there's a letter for you, Alison, lying on the lobby-table. Shall I bring it for you?”

“No,” she said, rather hastily—and with some color mounting to her face, for she guessed what this might be—“I will get it myself. Will you go down to the boat, Flora? I shall be after you in a moment.”

So she quickly went back through the garden, entered the house, and found the letter lying there. Rather breathlessly she tore it open, and glanced

rapidly over its several pages, with a wonderful strange feeling rising and rising in her heart. For what was all this? Remonstrances?—reproaches?—warnings of the opprobrium she was earning for herself, and the shame she was bringing on those nearest and dearest to her? No; it was far from that; and she read with an ever-increasing wonder and a joy that she could hardly have explained to herself. The astonishing thing was that Agnes did not even once refer to the fact of Ludovick Macdonell being a Catholic—though that had been put prominently enough in Alison's letter to her. This was all praise of Ludovick Macdonell himself; though how Agnes could have discerned so many fine and admirable qualities in him during the brief hour of his visit, her sister was far too surprised and pleased to stay to inquire. And very affectionately did Agnes write of Alison herself—quite un-usually so, indeed, for people in Kirk o' Shields are reticent in such matters; but now there was a convenient distance separating them; and she could say things on paper that probably she would not have said to Alison herself. And not only did the younger sister appear extremely gratified, and even proud, that Alison was going to marry the young man who had seemed to her so much of a hero, but also she said plainly that she was glad the arrangement on which the Cowan family counted was not going to be carried out. She con-

fessed that she had always looked forward to seeing Alison a minister's wife; there was something so wise and gentle and thoughtful about her that she would be a great help and comfort to a congregation; but James Cowan was not her ideal of a young minister; moreover, until he got a church, she feared Alison would have been unhappy while living at Corbieslaw. And might she write to Captain Macdonell, to congratulate him? And would he answer her letter? She wanted to tell him a good deal about her sister that perhaps he had not discovered yet. Of course, if this was to be a secret in the mean time, as Alison appeared to desire, then a secret it should be; but she did not understand why there was any necessity. And then the letter wound up with all sorts of kind wishes and messages: it was about as comforting an epistle as could have been composed in these peculiar circumstances.

For many and many a day thereafter that happy evening lingered in Alison's memory, though she hardly knew how she got through the garden, and across the road, and down the shingle to the boat that was awaiting her. All the air seemed full of music; this was like a love-letter that had been sent her; all kinds of wistful fancies that had once been discarded were summoned back now; and she wished to say just two words to Ludovick, and to look into his eyes.

"You seem to have had good news, Alison," said Flora to her, when she had got seated at the tiller, and the two cousins were leisurely pulling out into the loch.

"Yes," she answered, with her cheeks grown rosy-red, "I—I have had a very kind letter—from Agnes."

"Oh, from Agnes?" Flora repeated, with a glance of surprise; but she said nothing further; and presently brother and sister had settled into their long steady stroke, which seemed to afford them sufficient interest and occupation.

As for Alison, she did not care to break the gracious silence that was all around them; her heart was murmuring to her of its own happiness as they pulled along. She did not think of asking herself whether there was not something suspicious in the fact of Agnes having so completely ignored all her references to Captain Ludovick being a Catholic, and the possible trouble arising therefrom; she did not reflect that her sister might, out of an extreme delicacy and kindness, have refused, at such a time, to say anything that would dim her tender hopes. No; she only thought that she would like to show this letter to Ludovick. Did it not confirm all his prognostications? Was it not a fair beginning? Her heart within her said yes again and again, with an exceeding comfort and joy.

Moreover, she had plenty of time to weave these fond fancies; for the two cousins, as they worked away

at the oars, were humming together snatches of Gaelic airs that did not interfere with her. It was a beautiful evening, now that the sun had sunk behind the western hills: just above the lofty peaks the sky was of the clearest gold, fading into a pale translucent purple overhead; while the waters of the loch around them were all of a trembling and lapping lilac-gray, with the universal, sudden, bewildering ripples grown almost black. As the time went by, the twilight became more wan and ghostly; and yet the objects along the opposite shore, under the darkening hills and the pine-woods, could be made out with a strange, a livid, distinctness. Then the first lights began to appear—a quivering orange ray here and there that told of a distant window or perhaps of an anchored yacht making all snug for the night. When they finally got ashore, and made their way up to the house through the garden, the slumbering air was sweet with the scents of the flowers, and there were bats flitting about the eaves, suddenly swooping between them and the pale, clear sky. On the threshold she paused and looked back. It was an evening long to be remembered—an evening of visions and dreams.

CHAPTER V.

A BOLT FROM THE BLUE.

BUT, as it happened, the very next day brought another communication from Kirk o' Shields that was destined to lead the way to a sudden and unexpected crisis. A little accident helped. When Aunt Gilchrist took the as yet unopened envelope with her into the parlor, where the rest of the family were seated at the table for afternoon tea—the Doctor having also dropped in by chance—and just as she was about to sit down, she struck her foot sharply against the leg of the chair. For a second she bit her lip in silence, and it was clear she was suffering considerable pain; then she muttered to herself,

“Dang this confounded thing!”

“Your language, Jane,” said the Doctor, quite good-naturedly, “might be a little more gentle.”

“Oh, my language!” she said, opening forth in wrath. “My language, indeed! You can talk fine enough about your oxides, and sulphates, and trash o' that kind, to bamboozle a lot of fools!—but much good

your long-winded names have ever done to me! Here, Alison, run away and get me a cloth slipper—this infernal fire is like to burn my toe off, now it's begun again!"

Alison went quickly away, and returned with a pair of cloth slippers, and forthwith the hurt foot was in a measure relieved. But when Alison was for unbuttoning the other boot, her aunt said no—the one was enough.

"Why, aunt," she protested, "do you mean to say you can sit in comfort with a boot on one foot and a shoe on the other?"

"Oh, listen, mother," Flora cried. "Isn't that like Alison? Isn't she prim and precise! She's bound to grow up an old maid!"

"More likely," Master Hugh put in, "she'll grow up to be like the old lady who declared she couldn't go in proper style to have her photograph taken until she had put some eau-de-cologne on her handkerchief"—though it is to be imagined that that apocryphal old lady was an invention of the moment.

But meanwhile Aunt Gilchrist had taken her seat, looking very gloomy, for she was vexed that Periphery should have been so easily aroused again. And perhaps she was all the more taciturn that the young Munroes chose to make themselves surreptitiously merry over her accident, and that they were openly aided and

abetted by the Doctor, while Mrs. Munro looked on and listened in mild amusement. Aunt Gilchrist would have nothing to say to that ribald crew. Nay, to escape from them and their covert jeers, she betook herself to her letter, which otherwise might have lain unopened on the table.

And presently it was perceived that the contents thereof were exciting her in no common degree. Indeed, her astonishment and resentment caused her to break forth into brief muttered exclamations—exclamations that showed clearly enough what was passing in her mind.

“Well, I declare!” she cried, with withering contempt. “Bless my soul and body, the woman’s mad!—stark, staring mad! . . . But I’ll teach her! To talk to me like this! . . . Well, I never did hear the like!”

“What’s your news, Jane?” the Doctor asked.

“It’s somebody that wants a lesson taught them,” said she, looking up fiercely. “And, my word, they’ll get it!”

“If it’s anything serious,” said he, amiably enough, “I wouldn’t advise you to answer it in your present state of mind.”

“My present state of mind!” she retorted, with scorn. “What do you know about my present state of mind! I suppose you would like to doctor that too!—brown messes and white messes—once every three

hours—to be well shaken—is that the thing this time? Man, man—Duncan, I wonder ye do not take all your phosphates and hydrates and stuff down to the sea some dark night and tumble them in when there's nobody looking!”

“I might as well, if I had many patients like you, Jane,” her brother said, with great good-humor; and presently, this frugal meal being ended, he was the first to rise, as his professional duties called him away again.

But Aunt Gilchrist took Alison with her to her own room.

“There, read that!” said the incensed little dame. “Read that, Alison, and tell me if there's another such impudent woman in the whole wide world!”

Alison took the letter—which she at once perceived to be from Mrs. Cowan of Corbieslaw—and carefully and deliberately read it through; but as she had no nerves on fire to worry her, she did not find in it anything calculated to arouse so fierce a storm of indignation. She was very much embarrassed, it is true; for it was all about herself and her prospects; but in so far as the tone of this communication towards Aunt Gilchrist was concerned, it was almost servile—indeed it may have been the specious plausibility of the whole epistle that had irritated the recipient of it.

"Well, aunt," said Alison, "I don't see anything in that to anger you."

"Nothing to anger me!" she exclaimed. "What right has that woman to interfere with me? What business has she to write to me at all? So you're 'devoted to the service of the Lord,' are you, 'and the interests of His church?' Indeed, now! But does she think I cannot tell what that means? Ay, but I can, though: I was not born yesterday, Alison, my dear; not a bit of it! The service of the Lord is that I'm to provide that stickit minister with a house and a wife at the same time, and support the whole concern. Oh, that's a fine way of providing for him; better than waiting and waiting for a pulpit. A pulpit, my word! To stick up a crayture like that in a pulpit: I'll tell ye what he's better fit for—I'd stick him up in a corn-field, to frighten the crows away! And then 'the distractions and temptations surrounding young people,'" Aunt Gilchrist continued, turning to the letter again. "Tell me now, Alison: do ye think this woman has a suspicion that there's something between you and Captain Macdonell?"

Alison flushed a rose-red, but she answered frankly enough,

"I don't know, aunt. It is quite possible. I wrote to Agnes the other day about—about Ludovick; and she may by chance have dropped some hint. Or per-

haps it's this—Mr. James Cowan met me walking with—with Captain Macdonell in Kirk o' Shields one day, and he may have spoken to her about the stranger—and—and perhaps that's it."

"So *I'm* to be her cat's-paw, am I?" Aunt Gilchrist resumed, still indignant with this hapless letter. "*I'm* to see that the stickit minister is provided for? And it's all for the service of the Lord, of course, and the interests of the church! My certes, I'll send her an answer she little expects: I'll teach her to dictate to me, with her cringing, fawning, sneaking pretences!"

Then she turned to Alison herself.

"Now, Alison," said she, in a much gentler way, "I'm not blinder than other people; and I've seen the way that you and your Captain Ludovick, as they call him, are aye together. I'm not going to ask ye questions, for young folk will have their secrets—it's part of the play, I suppose; but this I will say to you—this I'm bound to say to you—that ye need not be afraid to speak to me about *him*. No, I give ye my word: I've seen enough of him, and I will say this, that a finer, franker, better-natured young man never stepped in shoes. I was not quite so certain about him at one time; and I took the leeberty of giving him a hint or two—for I'm an old woman, Alison, and ye're a young one; but I do honestly believe this now—I do honestly

believe he would take ye this minute if ye had not a penny."

"Aunt," said Alison—but there were tears of gratitude trembling on her lashes, and her voice was not very firm—"there would have been no concealment—and least of all from you—but it all seemed so hopeless. It was broken off because I—because I told him they would never agree to it. He is a Catholic."

"Yes, that's true, he is a Catholic—I had forgotten that. But who's they? That woman Cowan?" said Aunt Gilchrist, beginning to sniff and fume again at the mere mention of her enemy. "What have they got to do with you? Who asked their permission? If you want to marry the young man, what business is it of theirs whether he is a Catholic or not? The impudence of some people, I do declare!"

"No, aunt, it wasn't the Cowans I was mostly thinking of, nor yet the congregation generally, though I made sure they would be terribly against it; but it is my own family, my father especially. And I thought about Agnes too; but I wrote to her, just to try—and—and I got a letter from her that was a great surprise, so kind it was, and not a word about his being a Catholic."

"And Macdonell—what does he say to all this, eh?" was the next inquiry.

"Well, aunt," Alison made answer, with downcast

eyes, "you know he has been away the last day or two, and I haven't been able to show him Agnes's letter."

"Agnes's letter!" she repeated. "But I suppose he wants to make you his wife, whatever any one may say?"

"I—I think so," was the half-heard answer.

"And I think so too!" Aunt Gilchrist said, with a proud kind of laugh. "Oh, I'll warrant him! Well, Alison, you may be off now, for I'm going to send this woman her answer—oh yes, it'll be an answer, I can tell ye!—when I think of the look of her face when she gets it, I could just skip round this room like a three-year-old, only there's that little fire-deevil sitting watching on my toes. And here's another thing, Alison: ye may tell me your secrets, or ye may not tell me your secrets, just as ye please; but ye'll see if I don't make it all fair and straight with your Captain Ludovick as soon as he comes back to Fort William."

Alison lingered, still regarding that letter.

"Aunt Gilchrist," said she, "you must not say anything that will vex the Cowans. They are great friends of my father's; and they are important people in the church."

"The wise little woman!" Aunt Gilchrist said, with another laugh. "Well, perhaps I'll not answer the fool according to her folly, but I'll give her a bit of my

mind all the same. Now go away, and tell Flora to stop that strumming, for I'm going to write."

So Alison departed—very grateful to Aunt Gilchrist for the kindly things she had said about Captain Ludovick, but not much reassured otherwise. She knew very well that this brisk, independent, cheerful little Gallio was about the last person to understand the Kirk o' Shields folk, or what they would think of this proposed marriage. Her ways were not as their ways. The simple and self-sufficing formula "The Lord made us, and He'll take care of us," was a very different thing from their fierce contentions of creed, their strenuous and anxious faith in their own sectarianism. Aunt Gilchrist was delighted to make the most of life and enjoy the good things of this world: with them a heart-searching renunciation was the first duty of every Christian, and an austere contemning of this world the surest passport to the next. And if she seemed disposed to make light of the fact that Ludovick Macdonell was a Catholic, Alison was well aware that the members of East Street Church would be in no such mind.

Meanwhile it was remarkable that when Captain Ludovick was absent from Fort William the days did not pass nearly so quickly; and frequently, when her cousins were otherwise occupied, and her aunt did not need her assistance, Alison had to be content with the

companionship of the boy John. She was trying to reform Johnny now; but the task was an uphill one. When she endeavored to reason him out of his belief in witches and warlocks and malevolent spirits, he answered with all kinds of stories of what had actually happened. And then when she remonstrated with him about his own conduct—his cruelty and malice and revengeful tricks—Johnny had always some excuse or another for his wickedness. One morning, as she was getting ready to go down-stairs, she casually went to the window, which was a habit she had unconsciously formed. She did not wish to play the spy on Johnny; but this window commanded a view of the garden, the road, and the shore; and if Johnny was anywhere about, he was sure to be in some mischief or other; so that she was continually catching him in this fashion, after which she would go and lecture him severely. On this occasion she perceived that Johnny was merely talking to a small boy who was outside the railings, in the road; and there did not seem much harm in that. It was clear that Johnny was trying to persuade the small boy to come round by the gate into the garden; but the other shook his head and remained where he was. Thereupon Johnny took something out of his pocket and showed it. The small boy approached a little nearer. Then Alison made out that what Johnny held in his hand was a common clay pipe; and now he

pulled out a match and lit the pipe, which he passed through the railings to the small boy, who began to smoke. She was very angry that John should have been teaching that flaxen-haired urchin so wicked a practice; but little did she know what it all meant. She went back to finish her dressing, resolved to rebuke him by-and-by.

When she got hold of him later on she said, sternly,

"What were you about this morning, Johnny? I suppose you thought no one saw you? How dare you go and teach a little boy to smoke tobacco!"

Now Johnny, so far from being disconcerted or frightened, grinned in honest anticipation that she would enjoy his little joke.

"Aw, Cosh, it wass the finest thing I ever sah!" said he. "He wass getting seecker and seecker, and whiter and whiter; and before he went aweh he could scarcely crah along the road!"

Then a suspicion of the truth flashed upon her.

"Do you mean to say," she demanded, "that you deliberately got that little boy to smoke in order to make him sick?"

"Well," said Johnny, sturdily, "there hass been more as once that him and his big brother they were throwing stons at me. And I said to myself, 'Ferry

well; throw aweh; it is your turn now, but it will be my turn some other time.' ”

“Yes,” said she, indignantly, “but you took good care it was not the big brother you were revenged on!”

Johnny was not a whit abashed by this taunt.

“Well,” said he, “the big brother is bigger than me, and he throws stons at me; and if the little one is smaller than me, then it is my turn. Two is too many for one; but when you get them separate, then is the chance. Cosh, that one will not be for throwing stons for a little while! And if he did not want to smok, what made him smok?”

“I suppose you pretended to be friends with him?” said she—but in truth she despaired of bringing this incorrigible lad to a sense of his iniquities.

Johnny grinned again.

“Oh ay, he wass ferry suspeecious at the first. Mebbe he thought there wass gunpoother in the pipe. But I had to light it myself and gif it to him; and I said he would never be a man at ahl until he learned to smok; and I said that smokkin wass ferry nice—and mebbe so it uz, or they would not be ahl at it. But where is he now?” continued Johnny, with a sudden, incoherent laugh of fiendishness. “Well, I think he is lying down on the shore, with his head on the

cold stons, and his cheeks as white as a sheet of paper!"

"I suppose you think it very clever to torture a small boy like that!" said she, angrily. "But wait a little. Wait till he tells his people at home—wait till he tells his big brother—then you'll catch it!"

But this threat was not of the least avail.

"No, no, I'm not thinking he will do that," Johnny said, coolly. "He will not say a word to any one, not to any one at ahl, for fear of a strapping. He will not say a word. But he will be in less of a hurry to throw stons at me again!"

And then once more she had to give up the task of reforming this reprobate as something quite hopeless; for Johnny had always some argument with which to meet her remonstrances. Nor was it any use to warn him that sooner or later he would receive a sound thrashing, for he had been let off too many times before; besides, in this strange world in which he found himself, surrounded on all hands by malevolent creatures, armed with fists and claws and hoofs and stings to injure him, he had so much to do in fighting these enemies and in getting his revenge (either on them or their congeners) that he soon forgot warnings. He was too busy, in fact—for he was determined not to have the worst of this incessant conflict; and where he could not win to victory by strength, he could fall back upon

a very respectable fund of patience and astuteness and malicious cunning.

One evening Flora and Alison were strolling backward and forward through the garden, arm-in-arm. They were bareheaded, for the air was warm and still; Flora carried a scarlet double poppy hanging from her hand, Alison had a white rose at her neck. And no doubt any passer-by would have thought that these two pensive maidens were merely drinking in the balmy air, and idly regarding the various bright beds of pansies and snapdragon and sweet-william; whereas the truth was that Miss Flora was entertaining her companion with sundry experiences of her own, especially as regards young men, and their insensate folly and simplicity as she had seen these exhibited on diverse occasions. It was hardly an edifying conversation; for Miss Flora frankly confessed that nothing delighted her so much as to see two young men at daggers drawn on her account, and trying darkly to conceal the same. Her own cantrips and coquetries were lightly glossed over; but Alison could guess a good deal; she knew where lay the origin of these bitter underhand bickerings and strivings and animosities. The demure smile that was in this handsome damsel's eyes was a sufficient admission.

"Hollo!" she exclaimed, happening to look along the road, "there's Ludovick come back." And then, as

a sudden after-thought: "Well, I'm going round to Mrs. MacInnes, to beg for some sprays of her copper beech, for the dining-room fireplace. I wonder why some of the old people call it the 'bloody' beech: some legend, most likely. I suppose I can go round without getting my bonnet."

So she went down to the gate just in time to meet Ludovick there; shook hands with him, and asked him about certain common friends of theirs in Edinburgh; and then went carelessly on her way. By this means she left him to find Alison alone in the garden.

"I have something to tell you, Ludovick," said she, rather shyly, when he came up.

"And I can see by your face that it isn't very bad news," said he. "Let's sit down on this seat, and you can tell me all about it. Well?"

"I have heard from Agnes," she said, when they were seated together, just outside the house.

"Yes, and she hasn't cried 'Bogey' at all?" he said, cheerfully.

"No—"

"Didn't I tell you?" he broke in. "Wasn't I sure of it? Well, now, there is some encouragement for you: that will give you heart of grace for a beginning at least—"

"Yes, but, Ludovick," Alison said, with a kind of rueful smile, "it's all very well for you to make light

of difficulties—for you simply won't look at them. Now in this letter it is rather odd that Agnes doesn't say a single word about your being a Catholic—”

“Why should she?” he asked. “Why should anybody?”

“But I particularly mentioned it,” was her reply, for she had been pondering over this matter, “and told her all my perplexities, and what I feared. Well, she doesn't say a word in answer to all that! She says a lot of very nice things about you, and is very kind to me; but there's not a word with regard to the very question I wrote to her about!”

“Because that is unnecessary,” said he, “and she knew it.”

Alison shook her head doubtfully.

“I am not so sure,” she said. “However, there is one thing I must tell you—Aunt Gilchrist knows all about it now, and she approves—”

“Of course she does!” said this hapless young man, who did not dream how soon his buoyant confidence and dearest hopes were all to be dashed to the ground. “I could have foretold that. Your aunt Gilchrist and I are excellent friends, and quite understand each other. We had a talk last summer—about you. But what led her to say anything definite?”

“There's a Mrs. Cowan,” Alison made answer,

rather hanging down her head the while. "I—I told you—about that young man—"

"Oh yes, I remember," said he, carelessly, "the fellow with the long-tailed coat and the flabby trousers."

"And—and Mrs. Cowan wrote to Aunt Gilchrist about him—and about me—"

"Really! That was very kind—very considerate," he said—for he did not seem to concern himself much about this rival. "She wanted to secure the prize for her hopeful son. Very natural. Well?"

"Well, Aunt Gilchrist was very angry—besides, she happened to hurt her foot just as she got the letter, and that made her all the more irritable; and before sending her answer she questioned me about—about you, Ludovick—and she approved at once, and without hardly saying anything about your being a Catholic—"

"There!" said he. "There is another one!"

But Alison was not so confident as he was.

"I'm afraid that answer of Aunt Gilchrist's will make mischief, Ludovick," she said, absently.

"Oh, nonsense!" he cried. "Why, Alison, you mustn't be afraid of those people. You're in Lochaber now—you're not in Kirk o' Shields! I believe they cow you when they get you among them—you that have courage and nerve for anything when your own natural self gets the upperhand. Here you are not frightened

of anything—I believe you'd face Johnny's big Duffle himself if you saw him coming along the road. And now you have got an answer from the only two people you have consulted; and you see they don't anticipate any terrible opposition. Of course," said he, presently, with more of gentle consideration in his voice, "I quite understand your hesitation. You find yourself at present very much alone. You don't know what may happen; and you have been brought up to put weight on the opinion of all those people. But you see, Alison, if once the definite step were taken, you wouldn't be any longer alone; you would have given me the right to be your protector; and I can answer for it that I will take care you sha'n't be harmed or interfered with by anybody's opinion or opposition. You are alone now. You wouldn't be alone then."

She looked up to him, as if already appealing for that guidance and protection, and she said,

"Then what would you have me do now?"

"Well," said he, "I don't think you could do better, in order to be rid of all these anxieties, than write to your father at once, and tell him frankly the whole position of affairs."

Her eyes widened with a sudden apprehension; then she said, gravely,

"I would rather wait—until I could speak to him. Writing seems so cold a thing."

He said, with a smile,

"Won't you have lost a great part of your courage, Alison, when once you are back in Kirk o' Shields? And in the mean time, why should you suffer anxiety, when the way is clear?"

The way was not so clear as he imagined. At this moment Flora made her appearance, approaching the gate with a few branches of the "bloody beech" in her hand. As she came up through the garden she said,

"Now you may scold me, Alison, as much as you please. I met the postman this afternoon, and got the letters from him, and the one for you I put in my pocket, and forgot all about it until a couple of minutes ago. Here it is. I'm very sorry!"

"I'm sure it doesn't matter," Alison said, as she took the letter from Flora, who straightway went into the house with her leaves.

And then Alison glanced at the envelope, and started slightly.

"This is from Agnes," said she to her companion. "You won't mind my opening it?—perhaps she has something further to say."

As for him, he was anticipating no evil, and it did not occur to him to watch the expression of her face as she ran her frightened eyes over these brief pages,

that were written in a tremulous and uncertain hand. Her lips grew very pale, but she said nothing. Even when she had finished she did not stir; she seemed scarcely to breathe; she held the letter in her clinched fingers, and blankly gazed at it.

“DEAREST ALISON,” her sister wrote, in that trembling hand, “I hardly know how to tell you. Something dreadful has happened. Mrs. Cowan has been here—and saw father. Then he came to me, and questioned me—only a few words—but I have never seen him look like that before—oh, it was terrible, and his eyes were like coals, and he spoke to me as he never spoke before. And what he said was that I was to sit down and write to you that unless you were back home within four-and-twenty hours after getting this letter, the door of the house would be shut on you forever. Dear Alison, my heart is just like to break, but what can I do but send you the message. Come home quick, quick, and go to him yourself. He said he was glad mother was dead—but, oh, it was his look that was so terrible. Come home quick, Alison, for I don’t know what to do. AGNES.”

Ludovick Macdonell was idly gazing across the loch, and at the darkening opposite hills, behind which

the sun had already sunk, while he waited for his companion to finish her letter. But when he heard her utter a brief sigh he turned quickly, and it was well that he did so, for he found she had grown deathly white, and in another moment she would have fallen senseless from the seat.

CHAPTER VI.

IN EXTREMITY.

THE evening after-glow had deepened and richened in its marvellous intensity of light and color; for while in the shining skies overhead there hung masses of crimson cloud that were soft and ethereal in their reposeful majesty and calm, down here the wide waters of the loch were all of a lambent ruddy-purple, broken everywhere by multitudinous swift-glancing ripples—black shuttles they seemed to be, darting transversely hither and thither through the rose-violet fire. And yet, despite this final glory in sky and sea, a sombre darkness was gathering over the western hills behind which the sun had gone down; and the profound and hushed silence prevailing everywhere seemed to tell of the coming of the night.

And it was under these still shining heavens and by the side of these lustrous waters that Alison and her lover walked slowly to and fro, he earnestly pleading with her, she almost too distraught to make answer; for the meaning of that letter was plain enough. The end had come.

“Ludovick,” she said, at length, between her only half-concealed sobs, “since ever we two met it has been one good-by after another, but this is the last; and it is better it should be the last. It was all a mistake from the beginning. And I have been the one to blame, I know that. I should have discovered you were a Catholic; and then—and then, after knowing it, I should never have come back to Fort William. I thought it would be easy enough. I thought we could be friends. But I am the one that is to blame; and I—I shall have to bear the punishment; for you are a man—you will forget it all in a year or two; but I am a woman—it will go with me through life.”

“Come, don’t talk like that, Alison!” he said to her, but very gently. “Things are not so bad as that. But they are bad enough; and I will tell you what it is I fear. You see, when you are left to your own judgment, when you are removed from certain influences, when you are here in the Highlands, in short, I do believe you are the most clear-sighted, courageous, self-possessed woman I have ever met with; but as soon as you go back to that town you surrender yourself and become quite a different being. You are afraid of the congregation; the elders’ wives are all-important to you; why, you even seem to owe some mysterious duty to those ancient Blairs of Moss-end—who were no doubt worthy old gentlemen in their own day, walking accord-

ing to their lights, just as you should do now, without being tyrannized over by them or their ghosts. Here in the Highlands you are bright and merry and talkative, and happy as the day is long; there you are a timorous frightened creature, who will hardly hold out your hand when a friend calls on you. I don't know whether it's the moral atmosphere of the place, or the physical, or both; but what I fear is that when you go back there you will lose your self-possession, you will let them do with you what they like, and then what will be the end? Why, that you and I may never see each other again in this world."

"Ludovick, what else is there?" she said, piteously.

"I wish you had never gone back to that town!" he exclaimed, almost angrily. "Why was I such a fool as to let you go back last summer?—why am I such a fool as to let you go back now?"

"Ludovick," said she, with an accent of reproach, "would you have the door of my father's house shut against me forever?"

"Well, I know what will happen," he said. "I know it to a certainty. I tell you, Alison, I do believe I understand you better than you understand yourself. I have reasoned it all out many a time—after what Flora told me. Many a night I used to lie awake in the dahabeeah we had on the Nile—a fine place for

thinking it was, the hammock slung in the small cabin, and hardly a whisper heard of the water outside—and I went over again and again all Flora's explanations, and I got to see pretty well how you were situated. And haven't I told you before now that you are a far more human kind of being in the Highlands—that you show all your frank qualities of mind and disposition—that, in fact, you are the Alison that all of us up here have got to be so fond of. But what are you in Kirk o' Shields!—the Minister's daughter, a cowed creature, superstitious, timorous, with all your natural gayety crushed out of you by the fear of the congregation. Oh, upon my soul it's too bad!" he exclaimed, in his hot impetuosity. "It's too bad! You—who have the spirit of a lark—who are naturally as light-hearted as a bird—and—and merry—for you to be chained down—to be shut up in that dungeon—that hole—it's too bad!"

But this indignant and incoherent protest brought no light of direction with it.

"It isn't every one who can choose," she made answer, rather sadly. "And it's all very well for you, Ludovick, to make light of duties; but the duties are there; and it would be better not to live at all than to live with a conscience that would always be reproaching you."

"Oh, now you're beginning to talk like Kirk o'

Shields!" he said, roughly. "I wish you would talk like our Alison—like the Alison we know."

"And what would you have me say, Ludovick—except good-by?"

The question was a simple one, not to say a pathetic one; but it received no answer. His soul within him was chafing against these unseen bonds, that were all the more vexatious that they were impalpable and not to be seized and broken asunder. He walked on in silence by her side, his brows knit, his eyes fixed mostly on the ground. As for her, she was regarding the now fading glories of sea and sky with the knowledge that, here at least, she should never look on them again. She was taking farewell of them, as it were. She was Princess Deirdri, gazing for the last time on the land where she had been beloved and happy.

"Alison," said he, presently, "have you definitely resolved to go back to Kirk o' Shields to-morrow?"

"What else can I do, Ludovick?" she said. "I cannot have my father's house shut against me. I must go back."

"Then, as I say, I know what will happen. Here and now you might make a resolution—I might even claim a promise from you; but there you would soon be under the power of old influences and associations; and you would let yourself be led. Do you forget what your aunt Gilchrist told me?—that you were very

nearly being induced to marry that wretched creature of a divinity student—”

“But that was different, Ludovick!” she exclaimed, in eager self-justification. “I—I thought it was all over between you and me—I knew it was—and I didn’t seem to care what happened—”

“And won’t the same thing occur again?” he said. “The moment you go back you will be forbidden to have any communication with such a frightful monster as a Catholic—and the years will go by—and some fine day I shall hear of my Alison being married to that stickit minister, as your aunt calls him. That will be a pleasant thing for me to hear.”

“I don’t think you ever will, Ludovick,” she said, in rather a low voice.

“You don’t think so now, because you are here, on the shores of Loch Eil; but you may think differently when two or three years of living in Kirk o’ Shields, among all those people, have changed you. And I wonder what Mrs. James Cowan—that is the name you will be wearing then, isn’t it?—I wonder what Mrs. James Cowan will be saying to herself when she sees in the newspaper that the Ludovick she used to know in other days has got married too? I wonder what she will be thinking then? or will she think at all? I suppose she will have forgotten there ever was a person, or that she was ever in such a place as Lochaber.”

"You are not—not very kind to me to-night, Ludovick," she said, in tremulous tones, "and—and I am going away to-morrow."

He suddenly stopped (a gray twilight lay over the land now; and these two figures were quite dark against the wan lilac of the water), and he took both her hands in his, and held them tight.

"Sweetheart," said he, in a very different voice, "don't heed what I have been saying! The very idea of losing you altogether maddens me! I can't bear your going away—when I think of what may happen, with distance and perhaps years separating us; and when I see you standing here so close to me, and not very happy, I suppose—you, my own Alison, that should be mine always—and yet you are going away from me—well, I was too impatient—and you will forgive me!"

These appealing sentences had to cease; some belated traveller was coming along the road; and they had to resume their walk in silence until he had passed. Then he said,

"You see, Alison, what I was thinking of is this: it is so easy for two young people to say they will never marry if they cannot marry each other; and they make promises and vows; and they separate, quite sure of each other's constancy. It's the commonest thing in the world. But circumstances are strong; you can never tell what may happen in absence; misrepresentations

may be made, or false rumours get about; and friends and relatives may be urgent until—well, until one of the lovers forgets what she has promised, or is perhaps piqued by false reports into marrying some one else; and the other one—well, he is miserable enough for a time, but he gives up the dreams of his youth, and by-and-by consoles himself as best he may. Oh, I assure you,” he continued (and now the whole twilit world was to themselves, and there was not a sound but the monotonous splash of the ripples along the sea-weed), “I could preach to you for an hour on that subject; for I’ve been preached to, again and again, and in very similar circumstances. I should like to tell you the story, Alison: perhaps you would care to know what the two sweet-hearts did?”

He paused in his walk, while she stopped too. He was regarding her curiously; her eyes were downcast; probably she was listening with sadly wandering thoughts—for how could a story interest one who was about to say good-by forever to the man she loved?

“They were both friends of mine,” Ludovick continued, cheerfully enough, though he never for a moment removed his eyes from her downcast face. “One of them indeed was my chum—Ogilvie his name. Well, at that time his regiment was stationed at Fort George; and it was at the Northern Counties Ball at Inverness that he met the youngest of the Ramsay girls—the

Ramsays of Kilcoultrie—Lilias I think her name was, but I've often heard her called the Flower of Strath-glas—and the two of them took such a fancy for each other that they were like Romeo and Juliet over again. He was quite daft about her—managed to get invitations to any country-house she might be stopping at—and worried his colonel's life out for leave. But the Ramsay family wouldn't hear of it; they are very wealthy—and besides she had become quite a famous beauty; and young Ogilvie had little beyond his pay. At last they forbade him to have any communication with her; and as they found that wasn't enough, they resolved upon sending the Flower of Strath-glas to the south of Ireland, where she had some relatives, to live there for an indefinite time. Ogilvie came to me. I got preached at, as I tell you. He was quite pathetic, and magnified all the dangers of the threatened separation; but I don't think I would have intermeddled on his account, if the young lady had not come and appealed to me as well. That finished me; I couldn't refuse; and when I found out what pluck she had, I became party to a little scheme, though the Ramsay family have no idea until this day that I had anything to do with it. The short and the long of it was that one fine morning these two young people, without saying by your leave or with your leave, got quietly married in Inverness—and no one knew anything about it for nearly three years thereafter."

"They got married?" Alison repeated, rather faintly—and she raised her face with asking eyes.

He was regarding her intently: her raised eyes were seeking, and fearing, to read the meaning in his.

"But that is not what I would have done," he said, slowly. "I would have no secret marriage—not a bit. If I were in a position like that—and if the girl had courage enough—and if there was a chance of our being separated forever—then I might ask her to go through a form of civil marriage before the sheriff, because that could be done instantly, and there could be no chance of interference; but immediately it was over, I should want everybody to know who cared to know. I should want to be able to say, 'She is mine; you can't touch her now; she may go back to her own home, if she thinks her duty lies that way, but she is mine: absence and threats and persuasions are of no avail now; sooner or later we shall come together again; in the mean time we will wait, if there is reason for waiting, but you cannot divide us the one from the other any more.' Alison," he said, "what is your answer?"

She uttered a little cry, and buried her face in his bosom.

"Oh, Ludovick!" was all she could say.

"Understand," he continued, "I don't want to drag you into any secret marriage—any hole-and-corner mar-

riage. I want everybody to know who has the right to know. I should like you to go right back now and let me tell Hugh and Flora, and Mr. and Mrs. Munro, and your aunt Gilchrist what we are going to do to-morrow morning; and after we have been to the sheriff's chambers, then you are free to go back to Kirk o' Shields. Isn't it simple, Alison? You are mine—but I want you to be safely mine, that is all!”

She withdrew herself from his embrace.

“It is late,” she said; “they will be wondering.”

Indeed she hardly seemed to know what she said; and when they turned to walk back to the outskirts of the little town—where the orange lamps were beginning to appear in the dusk—he led her by the hand, as if she had been a child, while he was persuading her that this step he was urging her to take was reasonable and natural and justifiable. She listened in silence. Once only, in the midst of his earnest, his almost passionate, pleadings, she stopped him.

“Ludovick,” she said, “if—if I hesitate—don't think it is because I do not love you, or am afraid to trust you. I have trusted you; I have given myself to you; what more can I do than that? But—but this is so sudden.”

And then again he said, very gently,

“I know, dearest Alison, that it is a very startling thing; but the circumstances are imperative. You are

going away to-morrow morning: it is a question of hours. But if you are so alarmed, wouldn't you ask the advice of your friends? Wouldn't you ask Flora and Hugh and Mrs. Gilchrist? They can only wish for your good. I don't quite say you should ask the Doctor and Mrs. Munro; for, you see, you are staying in their house, and they are in a way responsible for you to your father; but your aunt Gilchrist—she knows how you are situated, she is exceedingly fond of you: why not ask her? In any case you would have to give her some reason for your going away so suddenly; why not give her the true reason, and tell her what I want you to do?"

"Yes—yes—perhaps," Alison answered, absently: her thoughts were flying far afield.

But as it chanced it was Hugh and Flora who were first called into counsel. As Ludovick and his companion were getting back to the small garden-enclosed villas they perceived two dark figures coming along the road towards them, and as these drew near they could be made out to be Alison's cousins.

"Why, where have you two been?" Flora cried, with good-humoured reproach.

"I will apologize to your mother the moment we get back," Ludovick said, at once, "for having kept Alison out so late; but the fact is something serious has happened, and we had many matters to talk over

that could only be spoken of between ourselves. She is going back to Kirk o' Shields to-morrow morning."

"What! Alison?" cried Flora; and instinctively the girl seized hold of her cousin's hand, as if she would detain her there and then, and prevent any such spirit-ing away. "What do you mean, Ludovick?"

"It is for Alison herself to say how much I am to tell you," he answered.

She hesitated only for a moment.

"Everything, Ludovick—everything," she said.

Well, thereupon Captain Ludovick told his two friends the whole story of the engagement (which was hardly news, perhaps), of Alison's hopes that her friends in Kirk o' Shields might perchance be brought to sanction the marriage, of the peremptory letter received that evening, and also of his daring proposal for the morrow morning; and he hinted that Alison was looking to them for some advice and assistance in the straits in which she found herself.

"Well, look here, Ludovick," Hugh said, frankly, "I for one am dead against it. I can foresee nothing but trouble—for Alison first, and for both of you after. You would land yourself in for you don't know what. But in any case where is the use of talking? You couldn't get married in that hasty fashion if you tried. How could you get married at an hour or two's notice?"

"The simplest thing in the world," was the confident rejoinder. "My dear lad, I've been through it—as best man, that is; I know all about it. You get a lawyer to draw out a declaration; Alison and I sign it; you have two witnesses—you'll be one, Hugh, and the lawyer the other; then you take it along to the sheriff-substitute; he reads it over and signs it; you take the warrant along to the registrar, and the ceremony is complete. Simplest thing in the world!"

And then as they were going up through the garden to the open door of the house he told them the story he had told to Alison, in explanation of his knowledge of these particulars.

"But, Ludovick," said Flora, who had not yet expressed either approval or disapproval, "how did that marriage turn out in the end?"

"Why, excellently—excellently!" he said, with unnecessary eagerness. "The Ramsays saw it was no use crying over spilt milk; they made it up with the young people very soon after the truth became known; and I must say the old man behaved very handsomely. As for Major Ogilvie and his wife—well, I went with them as far as Suez last winter, when they were going to India, and I'm sure there wasn't a happier or merrier couple on board."

"Well, I don't know, Ludovick," Hugh said, doubtfully, as they were going into the house, "but I for

one wouldn't advise Alison to do anything of that kind."

"Anything of what kind!" Captain Ludovick protested. "This isn't a secret marriage at all! This is as open as the day!"

He could say nothing further at the moment, for they had reached the dining-room door, and Mrs. Munro came out to scold the two recusants (as well as she could scold anybody), and to inform them that they should have to sup by their two selves, as the rest of the family had declined to wait for them.

It was not supper that was in Alison's mind. She asked for her aunt Gilchrist. She was told that the old lady had gone to her own room. Thither, accordingly, Alison repaired—but slowly and thoughtfully, for she did not know how she was to acquaint her with what had happened.

And when she came to the door she paused there, irresolute, that she might gain some composure; for her heart was full. Aunt Gilchrist had been more than kind to her. And now she was come to say good-by; and she did not wish to appear ungrateful. There was something else that was bringing her near to tears; but she was trying to put that aside for the moment.

At last she summoned up courage, and tapped at the door.

"Come in!" called a cheerful voice; and then on

entering she found her aunt seated by the little window-table, the gas lit, and an open desk beside her.

"Well, what does my bit lady want?" Aunt Gilchrist asked, encouragingly enough, as she laid aside the legal-looking document she had been reading. "I was just looking at your name, my dear, in that paper there."

The girl went forward, hesitating—not able to speak—and then she sank on to her knees, and buried her head in the old dame's lap, and burst into a passionate fit of crying.

"Oh, you've been so good to me, Aunt Gilchrist—you've been so good to me!" she sobbed. "And I'm going away to-morrow morning; and perhaps they'll never let me come to see you again!"

"Mercy on us, what in all the world is this now?" exclaimed Aunt Gilchrist, in a swift blaze of anger. "Going away? Who says that? Tell me who says that!"

But Alison could only sob and sob, and made no answer; and pity for the grief-stricken child before her quickly interfered with the old dame's wrath against these persons unknown. She put her hand on the soft brown hair.

"Ailie, my dear," said she, "what's all this now? Why, I've just been delighted this while back to see you so light-hearted and blithe and merry, and now all of a sudden it's gone, and you're struck down, and cry-

ing like a bairn. What is it, my dear? There, now, get up and dry your eyes, and take that chair, and tell me the whole story. I warrant it's none o' your own wrong-doing; I'll be bound for that. But I know there's folk in this world just that contentious and cantankerous that they'll not let things go smoothly on. And to interfere with such an innocent creature as you! I say interfere; for unless faces tell lies, ye've been a very happy young madam since ye've been in Fort William this time. Oh, I'm not asking for secrets, never fear; but old as I am I can see what's as plain as a pikestaff to everybody else. Well, now, that's a dear! there's my lamb! you just draw your chair close up, and keep quiet and peaceful, and tell me the whole story."

But Alison could not so quickly recover her self-control; and so, as the simplest key to the whole situation, she took out the letter that had summoned her to the south, and without a word handed it to her aunt Gilchrist. And no sooner had the little old dame begun to read Agnes's trembling lines than it was quickly apparent she had forgotten those exhortations to peacefulness and calm which she had been impressing on her niece but a moment before. Her eyes began to burn; her teeth were set hard with indignation; and at last she dashed down the letter on the table with her clinched fist.

"It's *that woman*, Alison!" she exclaimed, with sup-

pressed fury. "It's that woman that's at the bottom o't; and I declare to ye she'll never rest until I set my ten nails on her smirking, sniggering, simpering face! I wish I could see that great yellow hogshead o' a husband o' hers take a thick stick to her back; that would teach her to interfere in other folk's affairs. But I've not done wi' her yet—my word, I've not; and for your father to be led away by a cringing, mincing, scheming, double-faced, wicked woman like that—oh, it would drive a saint wild! Has he no eyes? Does he no see that all her concern is to get you to marry that bit o' washed-out rag that they hope to make a minister o'?"

Alison shook her head.

"No, aunt, it—it isn't that has made my father threaten to shut the door on me. Can you remember—in the letter you sent to Mrs. Cowan—whether you happened to say that—that Ludovick was a Catholic?"

"Of course I did!" said Aunt Gilchrist, with rather a triumphant air; "of course I did! I thought I would give her a fright—her and her tallow-candle-faced son! Certainly I told her what *our* notions were as to your probable future, my dear; and I let her know pretty plainly that the probationer was *not* included!"

"Ah, that is it, then," Alison said, sadly enough. "She has taken the letter to my father; and no doubt she made the most of Ludovick's being a Catholic. Well, it does not matter. He would have had to know

sooner or later; and I suppose this is what would have been the end in any case."

"And so you are really going away back to-morrow morning, Alison?" the old lady demanded, with a curious look of interrogation.

"Yes; what else can I do?" the girl answered, simply. "And I came to thank you, dear aunt, or to try to thank you, for all your goodness to me—"

"We'll say nothing about that," Aunt Gilchrist broke in, without ceremony. "This is what I want to know—have ye put all this affair before Captain Ludovick?"

"Oh yes, indeed, aunt."

"And—and what does he say about it?" the old dame inquired, in an off-hand kind of fashion, but still regarding her niece.

Alison hesitated. What was the use of disclosing that wild scheme, when it had already met with Hugh's distinct disapproval, and with Flora's hardly less significant silence. Yet Ludovick had appealed to her to include Aunt Gilchrist also among her counsellors; and so, briefly enough, and with downcast eyes, she told the little dame what it was that Ludovick Macdonell had proposed should be done on the very next morning.

And what a change came over Aunt Gilchrist's face during this recital! At first there was merely surprise; but when she fully understood what was in contemplation she became quite radiant and exultant.

“Well done!—well done!” she cried, with a kind of proud laugh. “There’s a proper kind o’ man! there’s a fellow for ye! there’s my brave laddie!—and so *that’s* the answer he’s sending back to they folk in Kirk o’ Shields!” She laughed aloud in her delight. “I declare to ye, Alison, I could take three skips o’er the floor and back again, if it werena for that wee deevil Periphery that’s waiting for me! I thought, now, he wouldna be for letting you slip through his fingers! My word, that’s a good one! that’s the way to carry the war into the enemy’s camp. And you—what do you say? Is it to be ‘hey the bonny breast-knots’ before ye go away by the steamer? Are we to have a wedding sprung on us at a moment’s notice? As sure as I’m alive, Alison Blair, if ye get married the morn’s morning, I’ll dance a reel wi’ your good man in the evening, ay, if I die for it!”

Alison smiled a little, and blushed too, and her eyes were averted.

“You see, Aunt Gilchrist, it is not quite easy to say either yes or no, for it has all been so sudden, so unexpected. I have only spoken of it to Hugh and Flora. Hugh is greatly against it; he foresees nothing but trouble.”

“Hugh? What’s Hugh!” the impetuous small creature exclaimed. “Hugh understands about music and poetry and things o’ that kind: what does he know of the practical affairs o’ this blessed world we are livin’ in?”

"And I imagine Flora thinks the same way, Aunt Gilchrist," Alison said, looking up doubtfully.

"Flora! What right has that impertinent young minx to have an opinion at all? Tell her from me to mind her own business, and keep to her gallivanting with those young fellows she pretends to despise all the time."

"And—and you, Aunt Gilchrist?" Alison said, with some hesitation.

"Come here!"

She took the girl in her arms, and drew down her head and kissed her very tenderly.

"Ailie, my dear, I've never had child of my own, and ye've been like a daughter to me. There is nothing in the world I would not do for your welfare. And maybe I was a wee bit thing too hasty, because I was delighted with the spirit o' the lad; and—and I was glad to think o' they folk getting a slap on the cheek; but it's your own heart ye must consult, my lamb; ye must ask yourself what ye've the courage to face; for there may be trouble. But mind this—now mind this, Alison—if ever you are in trouble, ye'll never want for a friend and a warm welcome as long 's I'm above the ground. Now go away and think it out for yourself—and ye're a wise kind of creature, too—and ye've got decision enough when ye like: think it out for yourself; ask yourself what ye have the courage to

do; and then come and tell me—to night, or as early the morn's morning as ye like."

"Very well, aunt," Alison said, and kissed her, and was about to leave the room, when the little old lady called to her again.

"And just remember this, my dear," Aunt Gilchrist said, in a much blither fashion, "that when I promised ye a home and a warm welcome, I did not mean a Hydropathic. Not one bit! You and I will find for ourselves something snugger than a big hotel filled wi' lunatics drinking water. And if ye do get married the morn's morning, and if by-and-by ye would take up your naitural position in Oyre House, just you tell your Captain Ludovick that his bride will be provided for on all points, for whenever he asks me I'll come and be a mother-in-law to him for as many weeks together as he likes."

Meanwhile the whole house had been put in commotion by the news that Alison was going away by the next day's steamer; but it was now grown late; and there was not much time left for consideration as to what should happen on the morrow. When Alison went down-stairs, she found that her two cousins and Ludovick had gone out into the garden, for there was a clear moonlight night shining all around—the pale and silvery radiance lighting up the flower-beds near at hand, the white road, the gray beach, the still bosom of the loch,

and the far slopes and crags of the opposite hills that rose into an almost cloudless sky. She joined that little group of black figures; but she had no definite message for them. Aunt Gilchrist had left the matter to her own decision; and she would take the intervening time to think over it. So Hugh and Flora discreetly bade Ludovick good-night, and slipped into the house, leaving the two lovers to their own farewells. These were not protracted; for Ludovick did not wish to weaken what he had said by any needless repetition; soon Alison had rejoined her cousins, and in a little while thereafter the whole household had retired to rest.

CHAPTER VII.

FOR GOOD OR ILL.

LONG into the night, and on towards the morning, she sate at the open window of her room, with this ghostly, silent, moonlit world all around her, not even the whisper of a ripple along the sea-weed margin of the beach, not a breath of wind stirring the wan gray surface of the loch. A kind of phantom world it was, and she the only living thing in it. And as she looked absently and wistfully at the sleeping water, at the silvered crags and slopes that rose afar into the starry skies, at the darker pine-woods in the north, and the still more distant and visionary hills beyond Loch Eil, the farewell song of the Princess Deirdri would come again and again into her head, like some recurrent, ineffably sad refrain:

“Glen Etive, O Glen Etive,
There was raised my earliest home,
Beautiful were its woods on rising,
When the sun fell on Glen Etive!

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Glenorchy, O Glenorchy,
The straight glen of smooth ridges;
No man of his age was so joyful
As my Naos in Glenorchy!

* * * *

Glenmassan, O Glenmassan,
Long its grass, and fair its woodland glades;
All to ourselves was the place of our repose
On grassy Invermassan!"

For she was trying to put away from her the momentous decision she would have to face before the morning. It was her leave-taking—this time a final leave-taking—on which her mind was fixed. She had been living in a fool's paradise; Ludovick had warned her of it at Bridge of Roy. And here was the sharp and sudden awakening; and a swift end to all her pleasant day-dreams, and to that joyousness that for the time being she had deemed all-sufficient.

But there were two or three other chance words of Ludovick Macdonell's that haunted her in a curious way. Her imagination would insist on carrying her forward a few years and showing her a certain thing happening to her. She did not picture herself as Mrs. James Cowan. If her friends pleaded with her, if it was put before her as her bounden duty—well, that might or might not be: it was hardly a matter of concern to her. She might be Mrs. James Cowan, or she might still be Alison Blair: she only knew that the

woman she looked forward to and beheld in these coming years was a solitary woman, with hardly anything to hope for, and anxious only to secure forgetfulness of what was by-gone by incessant attention to the trivial duties surrounding her. One morning—this is what Alison saw, regarding herself as another person almost—she is in Kirk o' Shields, and busy as usual with her household cares, when a newspaper arrives. It is addressed to her by some friend in the North; she opens it; there is a mark that attracts her attention—then her startled eyes read the brief announcement of the marriage of Captain Ludovick Macdonell, of Oyre House, Lochaber, to Miss So-and-so, daughter of So-and-so. "And he was once my Ludovick," that solitary woman is saying to herself, as the newspaper drops from her hand, and memory flies swiftly back to the time when every hour was a delight to her, when kind friends were around her, and the days shining and clear, and her lover by her side, waiting for a smile and a look, in the far solitudes of Lochaber. And perhaps that Alison, grown callous and indifferent with added years, might dismiss the announcement of Ludovick's marriage with merely a bit of a sigh; but this Alison—here at this window, and with the knowledge that her departure was now but a question of hours—had not so schooled herself. This Alison, with her arms on the sill, and her head bent down on them, was

sobbing and sobbing as if her heart would break. The other Alison might say, sadly enough, "He was once my Ludovick." This Alison kept repeating to herself, "He is my Ludovick; and to-morrow I may be looking into his eyes for the last time."

Yet ever and anon the bewildering alternative—that she should go through a hasty and informal marriage ceremony just before stepping on board the steamer—would reassert itself, and press for a decisive yes or no. Guidance she had none. Even her aunt Gilchrist, who at first had been captivated by the mere audacity of the proposal, had grown doubtful. On the one hand was the girl's own natural dread of so sudden and serious an undertaking, on the other were her lover's eager and impetuous representations. And then, while her heart swayed this way and that, now shrinking back in fear, now grown bold through very desperation, there would come before her once more that vision of the solitary, sad-eyed woman living in Kirk o' Shields—and the newspaper with its laconic announcement—and her knowledge that now she was wholly cast aside and severed and forgotten. It was Ludovick himself who had told her that such was the way of the world. Lovers swore vows of eternal constancy when they were about to part; but absence, the persuasions of friends, perhaps false reports—all these were powerful solvents. She knew now what she had

to expect when she went back to Kirk o' Shields: no more illusion was possible on that point. Just as likely as not, she would be sternly forbidden to hold any, even the slightest, further communication with this dangerous person who had almost drawn her away from her allegiance to the true Church. And night and day they would be pointing out to her the iniquity of one in her position thinking of marrying a Roman Catholic.

The silence of this sleeping world brought her no counsel; the ineffable beauty of the silvered night had no message for her, unless it were to increase her sadness at the thought of the morrow's farewell. That unspeakable sadness followed her even into the land of dreams; for when at length, worn out by these conflicting anxieties, she flung herself, half undressed, upon the bed, and eventually fell into a troubled and uncertain slumber, behold! she was once more the Princess Deirdri, sailing away from the shores where she had been joyous and beloved. There was a sound of lamentation; her friends were weeping around her; she could see the pleasant garden-land slowly receding from sight, and the dark mountains gradually hemming it in. But what was the song of mourning?—it was no longer a farewell to Glen Etive and Glenorchy and Glenmassan—it was “Lochaber no more! Lochaber no more!” that the very winds and the waves were sigh-

ing and calling as the boat sped away to the South. And then still stranger things began to happen. For surely this is no more the Princess Deirdri—this solitary, pale-faced woman, clothed in black, who stands all alone in a pew in the church, with the rest of the congregation pointing at her and murmuring. Then some one reads aloud—and the sound of the reading goes echoing through the silent church—“*And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled, fill to her double. How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow. Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.*” She stands unmoved, and white of face; no one comes near her; the people begin to leave—turning and pointing towards her as they go, and murmuring among themselves—until she is absolutely alone in the empty building. Darker it grows and darker. The walls seem to come closer together: why, this is a prison—a

dungeon—and she is lost forever to the outer world. And yet she is unmoved; she is like a statue; no prayer rises to her lips, no tears come to her eyes: here in the darkness she remains unheeding; the life seems to have gone from her; she is as stone; she makes no appeal to God or man. And then—but she knows not how long thereafter—a sound strikes her ear—a sound as of distant bells—and a wild desire possesses her to learn what is going on in the world without. In the wall of the dungeon there is a small grating; she climbs up to it; eagerly she clasps two of the iron bars—and lo! a fair and sunlit landscape, with a white beach sloping down to the sea, and pleasant gardens, and dappled and far-receding hills. Breathless she holds on to the bars; for there is a wedding procession coming along—the bride all in white—the bridegroom gay and smiling—the bridesmaids bearing white flowers. Nearer they come—now they are passing by—and in vain, in vain she strives to make herself heard. “Ludovick! Ludovick!—have you no word for me?” she calls to him in her extremity of anguish; but he cannot hear. “Ludovick! Ludovick!—have you quite forgotten?” she would call to him again; but her voice cannot reach him; the wedding-party has passed by; her grasp relaxes; and with a wild cry of despair she falls backward from the light, and knows no more.

It was that despairing cry that awoke her; and when

she came into the real world again, behold! the new day was here—the new day that was to see her a bride, or a broken-hearted fugitive and exile. Quickly she went to the window again—to assure herself that she was in no black dungeon, forsaken and alone, with the wedding-party going on in its joyful procession, leaving her unheeded in the dark. And if there was anything that could bring peace to her troubled soul, surely it was this tranquil dawn that was now declaring itself over land and sea. Soft and shadowy it was as yet, for the skies were veiled by a net-work of cloud; and strangely still it was—the loch a dead calm, save where the smooth olive-green reflections of the opposite hills were broken by some wandering puff of wind into a shivering silver-gray. There was no blaze of morning splendor in this prevailing quietude; the only shaft of sunlight that came into this mysterious half-darkened world caught a solitary distant peak—a shoulder of rose-hued granite that shone clear and wonderful above the shadowed mountains of Ardgour.

Suddenly into this silence and solitude there stepped an apparition—at least so her frightened eyes at first imagined; but the next instant she had recognized the well-known figure of Ludovick Macdonell, who was coming idly along the road, but with his eyes fixed on the Doctor's house. And the moment he caught sight of her she could see how his face lit up. He waved

his hand. She forgot that she was but partly dressed; again and again she returned his salutation—for it seemed so reassuring to have him so near her, after those black terrors of the night. But he lingered there, in front of the small garden: did he expect her to go down to him? Then swiftly she retreated from the window—dressed herself in a kind of way—thrust her bare feet into slippers—drew a shawl round her head—and presently, with stealthy foot-fall, was making her way down the stairs and through the sleeping house. The heavy lock made something of a noise, but she did not heed that now; Ludovick was there, expecting her. And then the next moment she found herself in the garden—she rosy-red, and yet with joy and welcome in her eyes, he hastening to her with a look as glad as her own.

“What have you to say to me, Alison?—is it to be yes?”

He had not to wait for an answer—it was written in her upturned face: he caught her to him, and pushed back the shawl from her forehead, and kissed her again and again.

“So you are going to be brave!” he said to her.

She hid her burning face in his bosom, and murmured,

“Ludovick, I am yours—yours—yours! Tell me what is right.”

"But you are all trembling!" he exclaimed.

"I have been so frightened," she said. "There was a terrible dream—I thought I was in a dungeon—and there was one small window—and I looked through it and saw you—you were going away to be married—"

"And there's a true dream, anyway!" he said, gayly. "Indeed I am going to be married, as soon as ever this blessed town of Fort William wakes up!"

"But why are you here already?" she asked; and she disengaged herself a little, so that they could walk up and down the small gravelled path-ways between the beds of flowers, though still his arm was interlinked with hers. "What made you think of coming so early, Ludovick?"

"Oh, well," he said, evasively, "I have just been strolling about."

"Ludovick," she protested, "do you mean that you have never been to bed at all?"

"It was hardly worth while," he said; and then he added, "Well, to tell you the truth, I was determined to have the earliest possible glimpse of you, and I knew you would come to the window some time. And really it was very pleasant. There has been hardly any darkness at all; the moonlight seemed to melt into the first light of the morning. I have been walking up and down in front of the gardens, and wondering

whether the good people would be awfully angry if I went in and made up a bouquet of all the prettiest flowers, for the bride to carry in her hand."

"Were you so sure, Ludovick?" she said, slowly, with downcast eyes.

"I was nearly sure."

She was silent for a second or two; then she said—but perhaps merely to hide her embarrassment—"How delicious the morning air is! Don't you think the flowers smell more sweetly before the sun gets at them? That is why I like to sleep with the window open; you can almost tell when the morning begins by the scent of the flowers coming in, and the birds beginning to chirp. I mean when I am living here," she said, rather sadly. "We have neither birds nor flowers in Kirk o' Shields."

"I suppose not," he said, lightly—for he would not allow her to fall into any despondent mood on her wedding-morning. "But you are not going to live always in Kirk o' Shields. By-the-way, Alison," he said, in a sort of incidental fashion, "don't you think Oyre House looks very bare outside? I can't see why the gardener shouldn't get some flowering plants trained up the walls. I suppose you don't know whether honeysuckle or a tree-fuchsia would grow most quickly?"

"No, Ludovick, I'm sure I don't," she said.

"The tree-fuchsia is certainly a beautiful thing," he

continued, as they were idly and happily walking together, with interlinked arms, between those beds of flowers, "when you can get it to grow properly. I have seen the whole side of a house covered with it—and the rich crimson bells go so well with the dark-green leaves. But the honeysuckle has the great advantage of scent. Which would you like to have round your window?"

"I?" she said, looking up at this abrupt question.

"Yes; I was just thinking," he said, "that I must try and do something to make Oyre look less forlorn; and I was wondering whether honeysuckle or fuchsias would be best."

"I should think most people would say honeysuckle," Alison made answer, modestly; and then she said, "Now I must go in, Ludovick."

"No, not yet," he pleaded. "We have got the whole world to ourselves; there is no one thinking of stirring yet. I want you to tell me—" (For a moment he could not say what he wanted her to tell him; then he hit upon an excuse for delaying her.) "I want you to tell me what are your favorite flowers for planting out—beds like these, you see—tell me your favorite colors in flowers. You know, I don't think our man at Oyre has much taste—or perhaps it's direction he wants; my father and myself never think of interfering. Aren't you very fond of white moss-roses, Alison? I fancy

they are not so common as they used to be, but we've got some bushes—oh yes, we've some—”

“But I must go in, Ludovick! The fact is,” she said, by way of laughing excuse, “the pebbles are hurting my feet—my slippers are so thin.”

“Then come and stand on the door-step,” said he.

“But the servants will be about directly.”

“Oh no, not at all. You have no idea how early it is yet. Why, don't they say it is unlucky for lovers to meet on their wedding-day before the ceremony takes place? But then, you see, this isn't the wedding-day yet; this belongs to the night-time; it isn't day at all yet.”

“It looks very like it, Ludovick,” said she—for now there were stray shafts of sunlight striking on the higher crests of the opposite hills; and the yachts, that had been black as jet on the lilac-gray water, had now assumed their ordinary color, their riding-lights being no longer distinguishable.

But despite the ever widening and brightening dawn, their leave-taking was a long and lingering one; and even when she had crept silently back to her own room she found he was still in the garden below, waiting for a last look or wave of the hand. So from a jug of flowers that stood on the small table beside her she took a rose and flung it to him, and kissed her fingertips therewith; then she noiselessly shut the window,

so that none in the house should hear. But she did not go back to bed again—there was too much to think of on this eventful morning.

Eventful, indeed! For no sooner had Alison's decision become known throughout the household than there was very considerable perturbation, not to say dismay—the elder Munroes having to be told, and the Doctor taking no pains to conceal his strong disapproval of so mad a project.

“Of course, you are quite old enough to judge for yourself, Alison,” he said at the breakfast-table, when the servant had left the room, “and whatever you do will be quite legal and proper and correct; but I wish it had not been done from this house. We have had charge of you; your father will put the blame on us. And I for one cannot but think that so sudden and unconsidered a step may lead you into difficulties that you don't anticipate just now—”

“Duncan,” his wife interposed, with a quiet smile, “surely you have not forgotten that you wanted me to do exactly the same thing when we were sweethearts?”

“There's a great difference,” he said, quickly and uneasily (for the father of a family does not like to have his romantic exploits of past days discussed at his own breakfast-table). “There's a great difference between a medical student without any certain prospects and the young laird of Oyre. Your family were quite right in

their opposition—I may say that now; but where can the objection be to young Macdonell—what is the use of this hurry—what is the need of rushing into a hasty marriage—”

“Duncan, my man,” interposed Aunt Gilchrist, with but scant courtesy towards her brother, “ye’re just haver-ing. There’s plenty of objection to young Macdonell among they folk in Kirk o’ Shields; and if Alison goes back there without some such bond, I doubt whether she will ever see him again. Oh, I’m not responsible for the marriage—ye needna think that! I left it to herself—I left it to herself to say whether she had courage enough; but now that my bit lady has plucked up heart, do ye think I’m going to desert her? Not I! That’s not like me, I tell ye! I’ll stand by your side, Ailie, my dear; and I’ve got something to hint to your Captain Ludovick when I get a quiet word wi’ him that’ll no disappoint him, I reckon.”

“Responsible or no responsible, Jane,” said the Doctor, who seemed extremely uncomfortable about this affair, “you are taking act and part in it. And if it were an ordinary marriage, with proper notice given to everybody—but an irregular marriage—”

“Who says it is an irregular marriage?” demanded the little dame, fiercely.

“They are going to be married by declaration and

a warrant of the sheriff-substitute—isn't that the proposal?" her brother said.

"What then?"

"But that *is* an irregular marriage," he insisted. "You will find it will have to be so described in the Register."

Then Aunt Gilchrist laughed aloud in her scorn.

"Well, I declare!" she cried. "You do exactly as the law bids ye, and then the law itself tells ye it is irregular! Dod, man Duncan, the lawyers maun be as daft as the doctors! Never mind, it's a marriage all the same; and if I'm to be at the wedding, I'm going to make myself as splendid as splendid can be, and Alison is coming to help me. And mind," said this imperious small person, as she was leading her niece away with her towards the door, "mind, as this is Alison's wedding-day, I'm not going to tramp backward and forward through the streets of Fort William. One of you, Hugh or Flora, you'll just step along to Mr. Carmichael, and say I want the wagonette sent here instanter, and the best pair o' horses in the stable. And if the man has a new suit o' livery, then on wi't at once! Come away, Alison; it's 'hey the bonny, ho the bonny, hey the bonny breast-knots!' and if ye've got no special finery for the wedding, see if I dinna make that up to ye before long—my word for it."

And then again, when the little silver-haired, fresh-

complexioned, bright-eyed woman had got her niece into her own room, she placed her at arm's-length before her and regarded her.

"They've no frightened ye, Ailie, my dear?"

"No, aunt, not in the least," Alison answered, quite simply.

"There's self-possession for ye! there's coolness!—there's my bit lady, that would face a regiment of cavalry when her mind's made up!" Aunt Gilchrist said, quite proudly. "That brother o' mine—don't you heed him, Alison! They professional folk are just that timid about what the neighbors may say—they're a' living in glass houses—and they darena call their soul their own. But I thought he might frighten you."

"Well, aunt, this is how it is," Alison made answer. "I was very much troubled and very anxious at first, when I had to consider this—this proposal; but since I have given my promise to Ludovick, it is of no consequence what any one may say—that is all."

"Since you've given your promise to Ludovick!—and when was that, I wonder?"

"This morning."

"This morning?"

"He was in the garden, aunt: I went down and saw him."

"They young folk! they young folk!" exclaimed Aunt Gilchrist, shaking her head mournfully; but she

was not deeply displeased, and forthwith she went to her chest of drawers. "Well, Alison, I'll show ye the gown I'm going to wear; and if ye dinna say it's fit for a wedding, I'll call ye an ungrateful hussy."

Indeed, one might have thought it was Aunt Gilchrist herself who was about to be married, from the importance she assumed on this momentous morning. Of course there was a vast amount of hurrying, for the time was short; and yet in the midst of it all Aunt Gilchrist found an opportunity of calming the consciences of the elder Munroes, who were not a little alarmed by what was going on. She pointed out to them that they need not take any part whatsoever in this project, or be in any way responsible for it. What would happen, would happen after Alison had left their house. Her luggage was quite ready; let the lad John convey it down to the quay. Alison would say good-by to the Doctor and Mrs. Munro at their own door; and if she chose to go through a marriage ceremony with anybody—no matter whom—between that leave-taking and her departure by the steamer, why, that was her own affair, and they need not be supposed to know.

When Ludovick Macdonell came along, a few minutes thereafter, Flora's quick eye perceived that he did not wear his usual happy and careless audacity of manner; he seemed anxious about Alison somehow; he kept looking at her from time to time—though, to be sure,

she appeared perfectly calm and self-possessed. He had no opportunity of speaking to her alone until they were going down through the garden to the wagonette, and even then it was only a word.

"Alison," he said, in a low voice, "am I asking too much?"

"No, Ludovick," she answered, simply, and with frank eyes up-turned to his.

And indeed there was nothing very exacting or imposing or terrifying about this brief ceremony. When they drove along to the solicitor's office, that functionary drew out a declaration of marriage from particulars he had already received from Captain Ludovick. The two contracting parties signed it—Alison's hand just trembling a little; then two witnesses had to sign, of whom Aunt Gilchrist boldly claimed to be the first. The bridegroom looked doubtfully at Hugh.

"Perhaps you would rather have nothing to do with it, Hugh?" said he.

"Oh, I'm going to stand by you, Ludovick," the younger man answered, promptly, and he took the pen from Aunt Gilchrist and affixed his name.

The next part of the ceremony was equally brief and simple. Armed with this important document they drove along to the big brown-stone building in which the sheriff's court is held; there they sought out the sheriff-substitute in his chambers. That worthy gentle-

man read over the declaration, signed it, and handed it back to Captain Ludovick, whom, by-the-way, he chanced to know slightly; and the next minute, when they were out in the open air again, Alison Blair was no longer Alison Blair, but Alison Macdonell, whatever the change might bring to her in the coming years.

"And is it really all over, Ludovick?" Flora cried, clinging on to Alison's arm, and looking a little bit awe-stricken as well as amused; for there was something uncanny about this swift, simple, informal transaction that had in a few minutes so completely transformed the lives of two human beings.

"Well," said the bridegroom, doubtfully, as he pulled out his watch, "there might be time to go to the registrar and get a copy of the entry, if Alison would like to take it with her."

"Ludovick," said Hugh, who was a long-sighted lad, "the steamer has left Corpach."

"Then we'll run no risks," Macdonell said, forthwith. "I'll go to the registrar when I come back in the afternoon—there is no hurry; and we can walk down to the quay now, unless Mrs. Gilchrist would rather drive."

"Oh, I'll go with ye. Periphery will let me go that short way," Aunt Gilchrist responded. "But the wagonette must wait for me. I'm not going home until I see my bit lady fairly started for the South."

And now, as the red-funnelled steamer slows in and stops, picks up its passengers and cargo, and sets forth on its voyage again—and when the last farewells have been waved to the proud little dame still standing at the end of the quay—behold! this is no sad-eyed Princess Deirdri sailing away southward, surrounded by weeping companions. The steeled composure of the morning is no longer necessary; the ordeal is over; now she is roseate and happy and glad, as becomes a bride; and her cousins are as kind to her as they can be, though still they must tease her, and pay mock homage to her new estate. As for Captain Ludovick, he holds somewhat aloof; he is her husband, but does not press any claim on her attention; he allows the cousins to monopolize her; he appears indifferent—has he not the part of a husband to play? And is not the day a fair day and fit for a bride? The farther and farther south they go the skies get brighter and brighter, until here, close at hand, along the Appin shore, the sun is shining brilliantly on the sandy bays, on the rocks and crags half covered with ivy, and on the patches of dark-green fir and light-green ash; while away to the west, beyond the glassy plain of the sea, the far hills of Morven and Kingairloch have become of a faint rose-gray, with every scaur and corrie traced in shadows of purest azure. The throb of the paddle-wheels no longer bids her say a last farewell to Lochaber;

kind friends are close and near to her; her lover—her husband—is but a yard or two away, an outstanding guard, as it were; and if there were no marriage-bells rung for her in Fort William, they are ringing now in her heart.

Ludovick comes forward.

“I say, Flora,” he begins, “don’t you think it is rather shabby of me to let Alison go back alone? Don’t you think I should go with her, to see her properly established?”

Alison looks up with a smile.

“Well, Ludovick,” she says, “I don’t know what may happen to me; perhaps something not very pleasant; but I know if you were to go with me, it would be twenty times worse. You talk about your discretion: why, you haven’t got any at all! No, you must come back in this steamer with Hugh and Flora; I don’t want any one to see you with me in the railway-train or anywhere else; that would only make matters worse; and the truth is, Ludovick, perhaps—perhaps it may be better for me not to tell them what has happened—not for a little while, anyway, until I see a good chance.”

“Then,” said he, with an air of surprise, “do you want me to address my letters to Miss Alison Blair?—is that what I’m to call you?”

She looked down.

"Oh yes, why not?" she said.

"Oh, very well," he made answer, cheerfully enough; "it is of little consequence—only that would hardly be my way—I would tell them straight off, and let them make what they can of it. But just as you like. You see, Flora, I'm going to be a very obedient husband—at first. We'll have to lead her into slavery by gentle degrees. We'll have the rack and the thumb-screw produced later on."

None the less was it somewhat hard that the parting between husband and wife should take place in view of the on-lookers in Oban railway-station. The train was pretty full; the best he could do for her was to get her a seat in a compartment in which an elderly lady and her three fair, large, and bright-haired daughters were already installed; therefore, what he had to say to her had to be spoken in parables.

"Remember, Alison"—these were his last words to her as the train was beginning to move out of the station—"remember, you will have to be at Oyre long before the honeysuckle has had time to grow up to the window."

Her eyes were fixed on his: she knew what he meant.

"I am not so sure about that, Ludovick," she answered; but she smiled bravely as long as he was in sight, and even kissed her hand to him again and

again, despite the presence of these strangers, and when at last the train tore her away from him, and from the cousins who had been so kind to her, the tears that dimmed her eyes were not such tears of wretchedness after all.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SUMMONS.

ONE afternoon Flora was in the garden, busily engaged in snipping dead roses off the rose-bushes, when her brother Hugh came up from the shore. He had his yellow oil-skins over his arm, for it had been wet in the morning, though now the sun was hot on the flower-beds and the little gravelled paths.

"Look here," said he, gloomily, "we must get rid of that fellow Johnny. He's growing worse and worse. He has been so encouraged, and so often forgiven, that he is now perfectly reckless, and the end of it will be his finding himself in Inverness jail. It's no use. He doesn't believe you when you threaten him."

"Why, what has he been doing now?" said Flora, looking up.

"There it is!" her brother exclaimed, in disgust. "At once you are ready to laugh! That is the way you encourage him—and do you think he doesn't understand? Well, I don't see the fun of it myself. I don't want to be had up on a charge of manslaughter."

"What is it now?" she repeated.

"Oh, nothing!" he said, "only a little playful trick! When I went out in the lug-sail boat I put him up at the bow to keep a lookout—I thought it would just suit his laziness. Well, nothing happened till we were near to Corpach, when all of a sudden I heard a frightful yell right in front of me, and when I jammed down the helm I found myself just shaving the edge of a canoe—some tourist, I suppose, out from Banavie. It was a most extraordinary thing that I did not cut the boat clean in two—and I think the man in it was so frightened he hadn't a single curse to fling after me. Then as for your friend John—oh, it was a splendid thing for him!—he was grinning from ear to ear like a dead sunfish. When I asked the young devil why he had not called out, though I was more like hitting him over the head with the boat-hook, he only said, 'Cosh, you would have smashed him fine! I would have liked to see a big fat man like that flottin' in the watter!'"

Flora fairly shrieked and shrieked again with laughter, which only made her brother the more angry.

"Oh, you think that a joke, do you?" he said. "Do you know what manslaughter is? Well, the sooner he goes back to his father's croft the better; and a pretty handful the old man will have of him. I know the way he goes on at home. He'll go in of an evening, and say to his father, 'Get up out of that chair now;

I'm the only one that has been at work all day, and I'm tired.' And it's mostly owing to you, Flora, that he thinks himself such a funny creature, and prides himself on every piece of devilment he can think of. Alison tried to keep some kind of control over him, though it wasn't much. He's afraid of Ludovick, certainly, but Ludovick can't be here always."

"Talk of the—ahem!" said Flora, who was facing the road. "Here he is."

Hugh turned, and there, sure enough, was Ludovick Macdonell, just entering by the gate. But he did not send them a loud and hearty greeting, as was his wont. When he came up the path-way, they could see that his face was unusually grave, and his very first words, addressed to Flora, were of an astounding character.

"Have you heard anything of Alison?" said he.

"Of Alison?" she repeated, quite taken aback. "No—we have not heard—and I was wondering she did not send us a line—but you—of course, you—"

"I declare to you I haven't heard a single word from her since she left!" he exclaimed. "Day after day, day after day, I have waited, making certain that the next morning would bring me a letter, and I have written four or five times to her; not a single word of reply! And you have heard nothing either?"

"Not anything!" said Flora, who was quite bewildered. "Ludovick—you—you don't mean to say

she has never written to you since she went back to Kirk o' Shields?"

"I have not heard from her in any way whatsoever!" he answered. "She might be dead for anything I know. What can be the meaning of it? I confess that I did not write for a day or two after she left—I did not want to be too pressing, but even if she were offended with me, I made sure you would have heard from her."

"Don't think such things of Alison!" Flora said at once. "She is not offended. It is more serious than that."

He started slightly, and a curious look came suddenly over his face.

"Perhaps," said he, slowly, "it is against her will—she may not be allowed."

Hugh noticed that look.

"I say, Ludovick, he interposed, "it may be so; but you won't mend matters by doing anything in anger."

"Oh, anger or no anger!" the young man retorted, impatiently—with his face grown quite pale and set hard, for he appeared to be contemplating many and distant things.

"Come into the house, Ludovick," Flora said, "and let's talk it over."

"No," he answered. "No. This will do very well. You are quite right, Flora; Alison can't be offended. It's something else—undoubtedly." He seemed hardly

to know what he was saying, so intently was his mind fixed upon those distant possibilities; and a slight inflation of the nostril was the only outward sign of the war of self-control going on within. "Of course there is but the one thing—I must go and see her at once—I must go and see how she is being treated—"

Flora put her hand on his arm.

"Don't do anything rash, Ludovick—you might make matters worse—"

"Then I suppose I have not the right to see her—is that it?" he said, wrathfully (but indeed he did not mean to quarrel with this kind-hearted friend: the young man was out of his senses with this quick strife of pity and indignation and anger: he was guessing at all manner of things as happening to Alison in that hateful place far away).

"Look here, Ludovick," Hugh interposed, in a gentle fashion, "consider how difficult Alison's position must be. She is between father and husband—most likely she doesn't know which to obey—"

"Obey!" he exclaimed. "I don't want her to obey anything or anybody! I want her to have the freedom that every one else in this kingdom has. Is it obeying that she may not write a line to say she is alive? Well, I'll have an end of that kind of obeying—and soon!"

"Ludovick, you don't know in the least what has happened," Hugh said; "and if you went to find out,

you would be like a bull in a china shop, and make endless mischief. But there are two simple ways of getting to know, and you may take which you please. Flora can write to Agnes. If there's any objection to Alison writing to you, there can be none to Agnes writing to her cousin, surely. On the other hand, if you like, I will go and see what it all means. Mind, I never liked this affair from the first; but now it's done, I'll stand by you and Alison; and I'll do anything you want me to do. I can go down by to-morrow morning's steamer—and by the afternoon you'll have a telegram."

"Well, there's some reason in that," Macdonell said, after some hesitation, and holding his breath a little. "But—but why should I ask for help? Why should I keep away like a coward? And—and why should I put the responsibility on to anybody else's shoulders?"

"Ludovick, what are you talking about!" Flora cried. "I thought we were friends! But if you'll take my advice, you won't let Hugh go. His other way is the better way. Let me write to Agnes. I think I can be more diplomatic than either of you. I think I can make it easy for Agnes to tell us everything we want to know, without stirring up strife; and surely I may say that mother has been surprised to have heard nothing about Alison? Come into the house, Ludovick,

and I'll scribble out something like what I mean to say, and you can tell me what you think of it."

It was Flora's suggestion that was adopted, after all; and they went into the house, where she set about the composition of an exceedingly skilful letter—simple and ordinary in outward appearance, and merely as from one cousin to another; and then, somewhat more pacified, but with his hot suspicions in nowise banished, Ludovick Macdonell went away back to Oyre, and so the matter rested for the moment.

But they had not to wait for any response to these discreet inquiries: all the information—and much more than they could have dreamed of—came the very next afternoon, and to Aunt Gilchrist. Aunt Gilchrist, as it chanced, had gone out for a little walk—a very little walk, for Periphery was not wholly dislodged, and had to be treated with some consideration; and the postman, coming along, and knowing her well enough, stopped and gave her the letter he had for her. She was not far from the garden-gate, yet she paused for a second when she recognized the handwriting on the envelope. She too had been wondering why no news had come from Alison. And here, perhaps, was the explanation.

She opened the letter, which appeared to consist of an unusual number of sheets, and was proceeding to glance over these, as she walked along, when suddenly

she halted in the middle of the road-way, and stood stock-still there, while she deliberately went back to the first page and began reading every line; for this was what Mrs. Cowan of Corbieslaw, writing from Kirk o' Shields had to say:

“DEAR MADAM,—I hope you will pardon my addressing you, but I am sure you have still an affectionate spot in your heart towards your misguided niece, that has got herself into such sore trouble, from the which I hope with the Lord's blessing and mercy she may be soon released, to become again a source of *thankfulness* and *cherishing* to her many friends, including yourself, dear madam. The deceitful and *wicked* young man that induced her to forget the faith of her fathers and the way of her bringing up, and to go through a *mock* marriage with a Roman Catholic, has no doubt concealed his ongoings from you, dear Mrs. Gilchrist; but his cruel designs have been frustrated, thanks to an all-wise and ever-watchful Providence; and his own conscience will do the rest, so far as he is concerned. And as for our poor dear Alison, though how she could be led into such a thing, having yourself to go to, and being in such a position with her expectations from her aunt's kindness of thought and *generosity* towards her, I cannot imagine; but now I am thankful to

say she is penitent and biddable, and will, I heartily hope and believe, do what she can to make reparation, and stand well again in her aunt's good favor. For well she knows now that the marriage she was entrapped into, by such *wiles* as can be imagined, is not a marriage—it is a godless ceremony that the young man's Church, if that is to be called a Church that would destroy us soul and body, even that Church would scorn to acknowledge it, which is the more to be desired that now Alison can hold herself free from any bond, as I have to tell her again and again, and bound only by the natural obedience to her father, as far as this world below is concerned, to do all things as he commands and ordains, under guidance of our heavenly Father, who has put this trust in his hands. And now I am glad to inform you, dear and honored madam, that her heart, that at first was *hard* as the *nether millstone*, has softened at last; and no wonder, for when her father, in his own pulpit, before the whole congregation, had to lift up his voice and wrestle with the Lord in prayer and supplicate that his own daughter should be brought to know how she had wandered into the paths of transgression and forsaken the home and the teaching of her youth, and become a stumbling-block to the righteous, and a shame to those of her own age that had received the Sacrament with her, it was no wonder, and I rejoiced to see it, that the tears were

running down her half-hidden face in token of her penitence and contrition for the sin she had done."

And the tears were running down Aunt Gilchrist's face too: but they were not tears of pity and sympathy at all; they were tears of maddened and impotent rage.

"If I was a man!—if I was a man!" she muttered to herself, with clinched teeth; and she could not read any more of the letter because of her streaming eyes; she walked quickly on to the gate, and up the pathway, and into the house, dashing Flora unceremoniously aside when the wondering girl asked her what was the matter. And even in her own room she did not return to the letter. She kept marching up and down, wringing her hands in a kind of frenzy, and uttering brief exclamations from time to time.

"My lamb!—my lamb! My bairn—to be treated like that!—and not one near her to comfort her!"

And then, in the very uselessness and helplessness of her indignation she sank into a seat and burst into a fit of passionate weeping—sobbing like a school-girl, with her handkerchief over her eyes. When she came out of that fit she was a great deal calmer, but there was a look about her face, especially about her lips, that Mrs. Cowan of Corbieslaw would not have greeted with any degree of welcome.

“And now, dear madam,” the letter continued, “I would like to tell you what we have done as best be-seeming your niece’s interests, temporal and eternal, and as she is now convinced that the marriage she was so shamefully intrigued into would not be recognized by the Romans themselves, and that she is therefore not a wife, as the young man confesses himself, or why does he address his letters to *Miss Alison Blair*, though it is of little consequence, as she has been forbidden to answer them; but as I was saying, she is now, according to both the laws of God and man, under the government and direction of her father, who has thought fit to put some of his authority on to my shoulders, in *all kindness*, I would say, and I will take charge of her until this unhappy affair has been forgotten. It will comfort you, dear madam, to know that the wicked contract she was entrapped into will in time cease to have any power over her, for the law, as I have it on the *best authority*, leaves a merciful way of escape for them that have been so beguiled; and in the mean time we have but to see that she is kept away from the designs and machinations of that godless young man. She has placed herself in our hands, being sincerely penitent for the shame she has brought on a Christian household; and though there will be no harshness—”

“Harshness!” said Aunt Gilchrist, with burning

eyes. "My woman, if I was within reach of your ill-faured face!"

"—she has consented to do whatever she is bid, and our first step will be to remove her from any risk of further *contamination*. He will soon stop writing when he finds his letters not answered; and if he seeks her in her own home, or elsewhere, he will seek in vain. So, dear Mrs. Gilchrist, we have reason to rejoice in all proper humility and humble uplifting of a thankful heart that the sheep has returned to the fold, and that the Good Shepherd has not been robbed of one of His lambs.

"Just one word more, dear madam, if I may make so bold, for I am greatly concerned about the welfare of this poor, misguided young lady, and I would presume to hope that your *generous intentions* with regard to her *worldly* interests will not be interfered with by what has happened. The *kindness* of her *aunt* would be an additional inducement for her to persevere in the laudable course she has now entered upon; and I am sure, dear madam, that at no time could you have reconciled it with your *conscience* and your *duty* to allow any portion of your earthly possessions to come under the control of a Roman Catholic, to pay tribute to Antichrist, and help to fatten the *priests* and the *Pope*, that are the enemies of the Word and of them that dwell in Zion—"

"Oh, this woman—this woman sickens me!" Aunt Gilchrist cried, furiously, and she went to the bell-rope and pulled it again and again.

A Highland maid-servant appeared, with eyes large, staring, and amazed.

"Bella, there's a good lass, ye'll go directly and get that lad John, and send him along to Carmichael's, and he's to get a powny there and gallop as hard's he can out to Oyre House, and tell Captain Macdonell that he's to come and see me just at once. Do ye understand, now?—and John is not to lose a moment—not a moment!"

"Oh yes, mem," said the maid, smiling. "Johnny will go fast enough when it uss a powny he hass to ride."

But she had not got down the stair when this impetuous small creature called her back.

"No, Bella, that'll no do: I'm going myself to Oyre. Send to Carmichael and say I want the wagonette at once—just at once. And Bella, there's a good lassie, couldna ye run along yourself?—I'm no sure o' that idling fellow John."

"Oh yes, mem," the good-natured Highland girl said. "I will run along jist this moment."

Hugh, who was deep in his books at the drawing-room window, and Flora, who was busy with her shears in the garden, were considerably astonished to find the wagonette coming along at this unusual hour, and still further perplexed when they saw Aunt Gilchrist drive

off alone. But Aunt Gilchrist had many things to think of; and she did not wish to be interrupted by either of these young people. As she drove away on this pleasant afternoon, she took out Mrs. Cowan's letter again, and read it carefully over, in what she fondly fancied was cold blood. She even persuaded herself that she could admire the woman's cleverness in assuming that of course Aunt Gilchrist must be opposed to her niece's committing such a crime as marriage with a Roman Catholic. Then her references to Aunt Gilchrist's generous intentions, and certain concluding words about the possibility of brighter prospects being in store for Alison, were no doubt introduced in the interests of the probationer, the doting mother still in hopes of seeing her offspring suitably provided with a wife and a moderate fortune.

When Aunt Gilchrist drove up to Oyre House, she perceived that Ludovick was at home, for he was standing at the door of a small conservatory, talking to the gardener, who was within. Apparently he had been amusing himself by mowing the tennis-lawn, for there was the lawn-mower standing idle, while his jacket lay on the grass a little distance off. The moment he saw who this was who had arrived, he came quickly along, picked up his jacket and put it on, and presently was at the steps of the wagonette.

"How do you do, Aunt Gilchrist?" (for so he

presumed to call her now). "I suppose you have some news?"

"Oh yes, I have some news. Ye need not open the door, thenk ye; I'm not coming down. Yes, I've got some news, Captain Ludovick. I've got a letter; and I'm afraid it will put ye into a very violent passion; and that'll not do—that'll not do at all. Ye'll just have to keep yourself quite calm and collected," continued this eminently cool-headed, discreet, and diplomatic person, "and we'll devise something, you and me, that may serve our turn. But cautious, cautious, ye see. We'll have to watch."

She handed him the letter. The young man began to read it, but presently he appeared quite stupefied and bewildered.

"Why the woman's out of her senses!" he exclaimed. "Does she think there is no law in the land?"

Aunt Gilchrist knew there was worse to come: she waited that he might finish the reading.

"Well, Captain Ludovick," said she, rather breathlessly, "what—what do you think of doing?"

"Oh, I'm going straight through to Kirk o' Shields!" said he, still regarding the letter.

"Yes?" she said, with her bosom beginning to heave a little. "Yes?—I—I thought you would say that. There's—there's a man wanted to interfere. You'll answer a letter like that in person—and—and soon.

I'm afraid they have been rather heavy-handed wi'—wi' my bit lady—” She made an effort to smile; but it was rather a tremulous smile; and there was a surging passion at her heart that threatened to upset all her studied self-command. “Yes, I'm afraid they have been rather heavy-handed with Alison, before they could break down her spirit and courage. Captain—Macdonell—ye're not going to see your young wife treated like that?”

“No,” said he, slowly, and with darkened brows, “I don't think I am going to stand by and look on, if that is what you mean. It is about time for me to be there, I think.”

Aunt Gilchrist made a desperate endeavor to suppress the emotion that was nearly getting the better of her; and then she said, with apparent quietude, though her lips were still pale and trembling,

“Yes, I thought ye would be for going to Kirk o' Shields; and—and I'll just wait for you in the wagonette, until ye've got some things put in your bag; and if ye come in to Fort William with me now, then ye'll catch the early steamer in the morning.”

“That's very kind of you,” he said; and he was going away absently and thoughtfully, with his head bent down, when he recollected that he ought again to ask Aunt Gilchrist to step in-doors for a moment or two.

"No, thank ye, no, thank ye," she made answer; "there's no great hurry, but I feel as if there was; and I'm better in the outside air. The truth is, Captain Ludovick, I've been just a little thing upset by this woman's letter—and—and I'm well content now to leave it all in your hands. Ay, ay, I'm thinking there'll be a different story to tell when you get to Kirk o' Shields!"

"I sha'n't keep you waiting three minutes, Aunt Gilchrist," said he, as he went off to put the few things together he might want.

And hardly had he gone when out there came the old laird of Oyre himself, followed by a maid-servant carrying a tray, on which was a small basket filled with fancy-biscuits, and also a couple of decanters and a wine-glass.

"Indeed this is a flying feesit," said the white-haired old gentleman, whose shaggy eyebrows did not in any way interfere with the grave gentleness of his expression, and whose curiously suave and modulated speech had sounded so pleasant in Alison's ears; "and if you will not come into the house, perhaps you will take a little refreshment?" He himself handed up the biscuits to her. "And may I gif you a little claret, or a little wheeskey?"

"Well, sir," said Aunt Gilchrist (who put aside for the moment her hot indignation, and who was quite

touched by the extreme courtesy of the old laird's demeanor), "in the Highlands I'm sure there's nothing wholesomer than a little drop o' whiskey."

"Indeed, now, that is ferry true, and my own opinion," Mr. Macdonell said, as he filled the glass and put it on the splash-board of the wagonette; "and I hef been all over the world in my younger days. I do not think there is anything better than a little wheeskey, when it is good wheeskey. And you hef heard now of the prank that this scapegrace son of mine has played?"

"Y—yes," said Aunt Gilchrist, rather nervously.

But the old laird did not seem vexed.

"I could weesh it had been different," said he, with much good-nature; "but these foolish young people hef their own ways of looking at theengs; and I dare say it will be all right when the young bride comes to live at Oyre. And if you are seeing her, you will tell her that she will not find me in the way—oh no, if I am in the way, I will just take a small cottage, where there is a little feeshing, which is an old man's amusement, and the young people will hef the whole house to themselves."

"Indeed, sir," said Aunt Gilchrist, valiantly, "ye're just making the very proposal that would prevent Alison ever coming near the place—depend on that, sir, depend on that."

Old Mr. Macdonell seemed highly pleased.

“Well, now,” said he, with a smile, “perhaps we might live in the one house after all; for I do not think I hef a ferry bad temper—for a Highlander, that is to say; and if one were to judge of the young lady’s disposition by her face, then I would not call her a quarrelsome pers-son.”

“She’s just too gentle!” Aunt Gilchrist exclaimed, with a bit of a sob (for she had been very near to crying when she was making her appeal to Captain Ludovick). “And she’s fallen into ill hands—ill hands. The sooner your son takes away his young wife from among they folk the better. And I’m real glad, sir, to hear ye speak so kindly about Alison; and if she were here this moment she would show her gratitude to ye, I’m sure o’ that, for she’s a warm-hearted, affectionate bit crayture, despite the prim ways o’ her bringing up, and her pride and dignity, that would make ye think she was the Queen o’ Sheba sometimes.”

“When she does come here,” the old laird said, in his grave and gentle way, “there’s not any one will gif her a more hearty welcome than myself; and I hope you will take that as a message to your niece—that is to be my daughter as well—I hope you will take that message to her if you should be seeing her.”

Here Ludovick made his appearance, pitched his travelling-bag up beside the driver, and stepped into

the wagonette; the horses sprung forward; the white-haired old Highlander raised his glengarry, and went off into the house again; and Aunt Gilchrist and her companion found themselves with this long drive before them during which they could discuss what forthwith was to be done.

But on one point Aunt Gilchrist was very nearly becoming angry with the young man. She could not understand the curious leniency, or perhaps it was rather the contemptuous indifference, with which he seemed to regard Mrs. Cowan of Corbieslaw.

"She is merely a stupid and ignorant person," said he.

"She's a cunning she-devil," Aunt Gilchrist exclaimed, vindictively; "a bold, impudent, brazen-faced woman!"

"I dare say she thinks she is acting quite properly, and for the best interests of everybody concerned—and especially with regard to the interests of her son, for very good people sometimes give way to a little natural bias. But I wonder," he continued, "what she means by saying that the law offers some way of escape to any one in Alison's position? I suppose she has got hold of some vulgar superstition—there are plenty such, and particularly with regard to marriage. However, I don't think there will be much trouble about that. If

it comes to be a question of claiming authority—well, I have in my pocket at this moment a little document that I think will settle that point. Would you like to see it, Aunt Gilchrist?”

“Yes, I should,” said Aunt Gilchrist, getting out her gold-rimmed glasses.

But this was hardly a small document that he drew from his pocket—this oblong sheet of lilac-hued paper, with its printed matter resplendent in green ink, and with a number of handwritten entries in its parallel columns. Aunt Gilchrist, having fixed her eye-glasses, got hold of this formidable document; and by the aid of the after-glow that was shining all around them, and that made those green-printed lines look strange, she easily mastered its contents. It was entitled “*Extract of an Entry in a Register of Marriages kept in the undermentioned Parish, or District, in terms of 17^o and 18^o Victoriæ, Cap. 80, §§ 56 and 58;*” and then in its successive columns were all the details of the marriage between Ludovick Macdonell, bachelor, of Oyre House, Lochaber, and Alison Blair, spinster, of 5 East Street, Kirk o’ Shields. Their respective ages were given; the names of father and mother on each side; the date of the sheriff-substitute’s warrant; and finally the signature of the registrar. Aunt Gilchrist found herself figuring there, along with Hugh Munro, as a witness of the marriage; in short, this paper contained a complete

history of the ceremony, and an exhibition of the forms that had been gone through, as by law ordained.

Aunt Gilchrist laughed, and said,

“I’m thinking they’ll discover it’s rather difficult to get over that!” But then her eyes grew anxious again. “And, oh, Captain Ludovick, ye’ll lose no time in finding out poor Alison, and protecting her, and comforting her! It just breaks my heart to think what she must have been suffering—and alone, too—quite alone, ye may say, with nobody to take her part—”

“As soon as I can get hold of Alison herself it will be all right, Aunt Gilchrist,” said he. “I can guess pretty clearly what they’ve been about. They have told her lies about her not being married; and they have brought the reproach of the congregation to bear on her, and all kinds of fanatical terrorisms; then she had no one to appeal to; no doubt they threatened her with pains and penalties if she even wrote a letter. I don’t suppose they have locked her up: this is the nineteenth century—though in some things it hardly seems to be the nineteenth century in Kirk o’ Shields; but anyhow, if they have locked her up, you may trust me to find the key. And there’s another thing, Aunt Gilchrist: when we reach Fort William, I don’t think I’ll go along to the Munroes’; I will stay at the hotel, and be off by the first steamer in the morning. The fact is, it would be no use having this matter discussed by the whole

family. You know, both Doctor and Mrs. Munro were against the marriage; and although they are too good-natured to say 'I told you so,' still I suppose they would naturally exaggerate this trouble that has come along. I shall have to find out about it first for myself; but you may tell Hugh that if I want him to come and help me, I will telegraph to him."

So the little old dame—in a measure satisfied with what she had done—went back by herself to the Munroes' villa, and found the household assembling for supper. She was very reticent over what had occurred; but subsequently she told Flora that Captain Ludovick was setting out next morning for Kirk o' Shields, and that quite possibly Hugh might be sent for.

CHAPTER IX.

MAN TO MAN.

THE only hotel that calls itself a hotel in Kirk o' Shields is chiefly a public-house on the ground-floor, with the upper rooms devoted to the entertainment of an occasional commercial traveller. It was at this hostelry that Ludovick Macdonell arrived, deposited his travelling-bag, and told the good landlady that he should want some dinner in the evening; then he immediately sallied forth, making straight for the Minister's house. And very little did he notice of the squalor of these thoroughfares, or of the thick pall of smoke that did duty for a sky; nor had he any objection to this dull thunderous roar of hammer and engine and forge that seemed to fill the air for leagues around. To him Kirk o' Shields was an engrossingly interesting, even a fascinating, place: why, Alison had walked along these streets; when she was in Lochaber she had spoken of them and thought of them; now, at this very moment, there was the possibility that at any corner he might suddenly find himself face to face with—Alison!

He knocked at the Minister's door; it was opened by the redheaded, freckled servant-lass Jean. And it was clear that she instantly recognized him; for she retreated half a step, her black eyes looking frightened.

"Is Miss Alison at home?" he asked.

"N—no, sir," she stammered in reply.

"When will she be at home?"

"She's no staying here, sir!" the girl answered, rather breathlessly.

"What?" he said—for indeed he had paid but little attention to Mrs. Cowan's threats.

"I dinna ken; and—and if I did ken, I daurna tell ye, sir."

He seemed rather bewildered.

"What nonsense is this?" he said, impatiently. "Is the Minister at home?"

"No, sir; this is ane o' his veesitin days."

"Well, Miss Agnes, then?"

"No, Miss Agnes is oot the noo."

He was disconcerted only for a moment.

"Well, I'm coming in to wait until I see somebody," he said, in a sufficiently decisive fashion; and as he forthwith entered the house, she had of course to make way for him; and she shut the outer door when he had gone by.

But as soon as she had followed him into the little parlor, an odd change came over Jean's manner: she

was now quite eager and communicative—in this safe privacy.

“Indeed, sir, there’s been an awfu’ to do; and ye’ll jist say ye insisted on coming into the hoose; for although I dinna think much o’ my place—they unco guid folk are ower guid for the like o’ me—I dinna want to be turned oot neck and crop at anither body’s biddin’; and I wasna to tell ye onything, or let ye into the hoose, or say a word to ye—”

“And whose orders were these?” he asked.

Mrs. Cowan’s,” Jean said, looking a little frightened again.

“Is Mrs. Cowan your mistress?”

“No, Guid be thankit!” the girl said, fervently. “But ye see, sir, she’s ta’en the upperhand in a’ this; and mind, ye maun say ye cam’ into the hoose withoot ony will o’ mine; but I’ll tell ye what I can—I wull, I wull—if I’m sent back to Lernock-end the morn’s morning. And I tell ye, sir, it’s a downright crying shame the way they’ve been treatin’ Miss Alison—preachin’ at her frae the pulpit—frae the pulpit before a’ they folk!—and that auld wife Cowan whinin’ and whinin’ aboot penitence and remission o’ sins—it’s just—it’s just—but I’ll no say a bad word, though they’ve been near drivin’ me to’t mair than ance; and there’s Miss Agnes maistly oot o’ her senses, and clean oot o’ them she’ll be ere lang—I’ve to sleep beside her at

nichts, that was Miss Alison's last word, and it's greetin' for hours she is; and then terrible talkin' about angels, and thrones; and her mother, that's dead and gone, puir body, ye would think her mother and hersel' were greetin' thegither about what has happened to Miss Alison. I declare I'm jist fair scunnered wi' they unco releegious folk, and I dinna care a docken how sune I'm back on Lernock-side again, and herdin' my faither's kye, if I only get a sup o' milk for't!"

But the red-headed Jean's eager volubility contained no information.

"Look here, my good girl," said he, gently, "if you consider that Miss Alison has been so ill-used, don't you think you could give me a little help? I've come to take her part—probably she will go away with me altogether. And I dare say you have been told not to say where she is: well, I won't ask you to tell me, plump and plain—still, couldn't you give me some small hint—just some kind of indication, you know, without actually saying anything that would get you into trouble?"

He put his hand in his waistcoat-pocket, and pulled out a sovereign; but the moment she saw the money she shrank back.

"Na, na; I'll hae nane o' that!" said she, with considerable emphasis. "I dinna ken what's to be the upshot

o' a' this; and I'm no going to be cross-questioned before the Fiscal."

He hesitated for a moment. He was not quite sure of her; nor was he quite sure what he himself should do. It seemed too absurd that anybody should suppose that Alison could be carried off in this way and hidden from him. And might not this be merely a story that the servant-lass had been authorized to tell? Was it not quite probable that Alison was at this very moment up-stairs—confined to her room under strict injunctions from her father? He looked at Jean again. Then he quietly went to the door, and opened it a few inches.

"Don't you think now," he said, fixing his eyes hard on the girl, "don't you think now, that if I were to call loud enough, Miss Alison would hear?"

But she was not startled.

"Ye think I'm leein—I'm *not* leein!" she said, somewhat indignantly. "If I kenned where Miss Alison was, I do believe I'd tell ye, and snap my fingers at the whole crew o' them—Corbieslaw as weel, though it was him got me my place."

"I do believe you would," he said, for he could no longer doubt the girl's sincerity, "and you'll just take this little present from me to buy yourself some ribbons when the fair-time comes round. It isn't a bribe; you

haven't told me any secret; and the Fiscal may cross-examine you until his head drops off, when you have nothing to confess—don't you see that?"

He made her take the money; and they had some further conversation together, during which he learned that the Minister would not be home until the "hinner-end" of the day, and also that Jean was perfectly certain that Miss Agnes was as ignorant as herself concerning Alison's whereabouts. In these circumstances he considered that it was hardly worth his while to spend the intervening hours in this dull little parlor; and so, saying that he would return about the time the Minister was expected back, he left the house and wandered out into the streets.

But the more he thought over all this matter, the more intolerable the insolence of this woman Cowan seemed to become. A cunning she-devil, Aunt Gilchrist had called her; and no doubt she had got the Minister well under her thumb, before he had allowed her to assume such authority over his own daughter. As for the farce of carrying Alison away into hiding, Captain Ludovick at first paid little heed to that. It was a preposterous piece of impudence, and nothing more. We were living in the nineteenth century. The Minister was a reasonable human being; as soon as he was appealed to he would recognize the futility of this attempted seclusion. It was merely the act of an inter-

meddling and ignorant woman, who did not know that there was such a thing as an order of the Court of Session—a remarkably imperative kind of thing, moreover. No doubt the Minister was a sort of recluse, and little conversant with the world's affairs; he had allowed this officious busybody to take charge of Alison; and it was her idiotic notion that she could keep the young wife away from her husband by the simple expedient of removing her to some other dwelling. Which of these houses, then, held Alison? Might she not see him from one of these windows? Or was it not possible he might meet her coming along this very thoroughfare—or coming round the corner of the next street? For they could not have locked her up. He reminded himself again that we were living in the nineteenth century; and, indeed, was not much concerned about this foolish travesty of concealment.

But matters assumed a very different aspect in the evening. When he returned to the house, Mr. Blair was at home; and Captain Macdonell was shown into the parlor. A moment thereafter the Minister made his appearance—the deeply-lined, sallow, sad face showing neither surprise nor anger, but only a calm self-possession; and when he came into the room the two men remained standing, facing each other.

“Mr. Blair, I want you to tell me where Alison is,” Macdonell said at once, and without further ceremony.

“By what right do you ask?” the Minister made answer, slowly.

The younger man was rather taken aback.

“By what right? By a very good right, I imagine. I presume you know—indeed, you must know—that Alison and I are married.”

The Minister regarded him for a moment in silence; and then said, in his measured and deliberate fashion,

“You show some confidence, young man, in coming to me—to me, her father—with any such demand. I will not ask you what has been your conduct towards a young girl deprived for a brief time of parental guidance and advice, unprotected, alone, and ignorant of the consequences of her acts. I leave that to your own conscience. I am aware that in the hey-day of youth there may be an impetuosity that spurns all considerations and would sacrifice all interests and duties to its own selfish ends; but in time the still small voice makes itself heard—if God is merciful to the transgressor. I do not seek now to bring home to you a sense of what you have done; I leave that in higher hands than mine; but when you come to me and ask me to give my daughter into your charge—knowing, as I do, that the consequence must be her spiritual ruin, the forfeiture of her soul’s birthright—you cannot wonder if I distinctly say no.”

"You call yourself a clergyman, a minister," Macdonell said, hotly, "and you want to come between man and wife!"

But this stern-faced, sad-eyed old man was not to be moved into any angry retort.

"Well, you know," he said, in those measured, impressive tones, "that your own Church—false and perverted, as we deem it to be, and a fountain of iniquity—even your Church refuses to recognize a civil marriage. And you, are you not governed by its doctrines and practices? Who is your lord and king? The Pope of Rome. In his eyes you are not married. In his eyes my daughter is not bounden to you by any tie whatever. If you have a master, why not obey him? If you set him up as your king, why not serve him? If you have raised your idol on high, give him the worship and obedience due to him—and leave my daughter to live and die among her own kindred and those of her own faith."

It was the very simplicity and dignity of this man—his inviolable and serene conviction—that seemed to drive Macdonell to desperation. He felt as if he were dashing himself against impalpable barriers that he was powerless to remove.

"I do know this," he said, somewhat excitedly, "that civil marriages are established by the law of this

kingdom, and that whoever comes between husband and wife does so at his or her own peril. Do you think you can shut Alison up forever? Do you think there is no means of discovering her? Why, I thought it was merely some foolish trick of that woman Cowan! But now you come forward; you interpose; you accept the responsibility of what this ignorant woman appears to have done. Well, what do you expect will come of it? What do you hope to gain by it?"

"With God's blessing," the Minister said, calmly enough, "we hope to undo much, if not all, of the evil you have wrought. We hope to bring the child to a perception of her error in having strayed away from the fold of her own people. Her seclusion may be temporary: when she comes forth from it, she will come forth as one purified and restored to her right mind; and she will return to dwell within the tents of Israel, among her own."

"But this is mere madness!" the younger man exclaimed, for he was rapidly losing his self-control. "She is married! She is my wife! I don't know what your particular congregation may think; but I know that even in Catholic countries, let alone Protestant countries, civil marriages are recognized as freely as any other; and I know in this country, that the law, which institutes civil marriage, is bound to hold it valid. Valid?—I should think it was! There is no marriage more absolute and

irrevocable. And do you imagine I am going to stand by and allow Alison to be shut up like that, and preached at, and lectured into submission, and whined over? I want to learn something about this instruction that is going on: I'm not quite satisfied about the gentle ways of the saints. And am I to understand that you definitely and finally refuse to tell me where Alison is?"

"I do refuse," the Minister said, with tranquil self-possession.

"You don't know that I can compel you, then?" he demanded, with eyes afire.

"I know you cannot," was the calm answer.

"You think there is no law in this country?"

"You may appeal to the law if you choose to do so," Mr. Blair said, slowly. "But there is no law in this country that can force me to open my mouth when my conscience bids me be silent; and there is no law in this country that can compel me to hand my child over to the emissaries of Satan. You may appeal to the law, young man: I owe obedience to a higher law: every moment of my life I stand before a tribunal compared with which all other tribunals are but as grains of sand on the seashore. We who regard all temporal things as of small moment stand in the presence of a greater Judge. 'The Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our King.'"

The moral grandeur of this old man, his unflinching courage, the lofty position he had assumed were all lost upon his younger and fiercer antagonist, who exclaimed, passionately,

“Very well, then, take the consequences! You have treated that harmless girl—who is my wife, and whom I mean to protect, in spite of you—I say you have treated her with the most monstrous cruelty; and since you have determined to bear the brunt of it, you shall! You will discover that the laws of this country are not to be defied with impunity, whatever sophistical arguments you apply to your conscience. I tell you that I have the right to claim my wife; you accept the responsibility of concealing her; and if you persist in your refusal to produce her, then you will have leisure to think over your own folly, when you find yourself within the four walls of a jail!”

The Minister responded, with perfect serenity,

“I fear no earthly judge, nor any penalty he may inflict. In all things I would willingly obey those that are set in authority over us; but my chief allegiance lies elsewhere. If I have to go to prison, I hope to be as Peter and the other apostles when they were called before the Council and commanded to be beaten—they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.”

"Then to prison you shall go!" the young man said—his face grown bloodless and terrible to see; and without another word he burst from the room, and made his way along the passage, opening the door for himself and issuing into the street.

It was getting to dusk now; and mechanically and blindly he walked back to the humble hostelry, where dinner was awaiting him; but he could not eat anything; rage and fury filled his heart. He sate for a time there, thinking or trying to think: then he got up and went out and made straight away for the open country—if that could be called country where there were forges and furnaces more frequently than farms, where there were stone dikes instead of hedges, and where the road-side he walked on was composed of cinders and broken slag. Into this mysterious dusk, lighted up by the wild flames of the iron-works, he walked recklessly and aimlessly, conjuring up all kinds of imaginary fears and evils, chiefly consisting of cruelties being practised on Alison. For the situation was far more serious now. This was no longer a mere ignorant device on the part of a stupid, ambitious, and scheming woman. This was a deliberate attempt to break the spirit of the girl; a conspiracy; and a conspiracy not over-scrupulous about invoking religious terrorism as a means of accomplishing its aim. And the law was on his side, he knew.

“Stone-walls do not a prison make?” he said to himself, with savage irony. “Well, perhaps not; but they form a remarkably good imitation of it!”

For he was determined to hold the Minister responsible for this thing that had been done—done with his sanction, if not even at his suggestion. Where Mrs. Cowan might be he knew not. Perhaps she had taken Alison out of the country altogether, in the hope that absence, and pious counsel, and misrepresentation and calumny might bring the girl to a final renunciation of her lover and husband. Where Alison might be—where her cunning she-devil of a guardian might be—he could not tell; but the Minister knew—he was here—he could be got at—he would be made to speak, if there was any law in this land. And if he would not speak?—then to jail with him! The Court of Session had a short way of dealing with fanatics. Bravado was all very fine; but bravado sometimes collapsed in presence of prison-fare and inside four square walls.

The young man’s heart was hot within him. He began to recall, with a painful acuteness, certain terms of Mrs. Cowan’s letter; and the fancy that his young wife might be suffering all kinds of mental and moral torture in some unknown place, and thinking of him, and wondering why he did not come to her rescue—all this drove him to the verge of frenzy. He did not

notice that it was now raining fast; and he had neither over-coat nor umbrella. The black night was all around him; and above him the heavy, red-pulsating skies: sometimes one of the iron-works sent up a sudden flame that threw his shadow across the half-seen highway. But while this wild war of piteous commiseration, and indignant wrath, and thirst for vengeance, seemed driving him to distraction, plans were forming too. The very next morning he would go to Edinburgh and see his old friend Balwhinnan, an advocate there. Mr. Balwhinnan would advise him how to put the courts in motion; the conspirators would speedily learn whether they could with impunity steal away a young wife from her husband. Going to jail for conscience' sake sounded very noble and heroic: perhaps when the moment arrived, that fanatical resolution would falter. But if not—if the Minister still remained obdurate—then let the law take its course! If there were any question about the validity of the marriage, if there were any doubt as to the young husband's legal claim, this would be his answer! Perhaps the doubts would be removed when the doubter found himself within the compass of a prison-cell.

And sometimes a haunting voice would try to say to him, "What is this you are about to do? On whom are you going to wreak your vengeance? In your inmost

heart you know that this old man is no fanatic, no maniac, no charlatan, but one who believes in the Divine government of the world, who knows that for every action of his life he is accountable to his Maker, who is ready to suffer all things rather than offend against his conscience. Are you so blind that you cannot perceive the moral elevation—the invulnerable and austere integrity—of such a man? What does he care for your threats? What are your prison-walls to him?”

But he would not hear. Before his burning eyes there was a vision of Alison in her father's pew, her head bent forward, and tears streaming down her face, while that congregation of sanctimonious Pharisees looked on and rejoiced that the Minister's daughter was stricken low and repentant and ashamed of her transgression. And there was another vision as well—of Aunt Gilchrist's “cunning she-devil”—the cat-like guardian of her pale prisoner, the whining preacher, the wheedling and coaxing matchmaker; and he swore with his teeth set hard that the lawyers should pay a little attention to her also!

By-and-by he turned and set out again for Kirk o' Shields, through the thick rain. There was no chance of his missing his way—the sombre red glow was ever present there, in the midst of the black night. When he reached the inn he was drenched through; but with

the carelessness of a Highlander he sate down and ate some food; and then he told the people that when he went to bed they must get his clothes dried, for he was leaving early in the morning. It was to Edinburgh he was going.

CHAPTER X.

SOME SURPRISES.

ON Macdonell's arrival in Edinburgh he drove to a hotel in Prince's Street, where he was well known, left his travelling-gear there, and forthwith set out on foot to seek his friend Balwhinnan, whose house was in Moray Place. There had been rain earlier in the morning, but now wan gleams of sunshine were appearing; and picturesque indeed were those masses of tall black buildings, and the innumerable spires, and the great bulk of the castled rock all rising away into a confusion of golden clouds and moving mists and smoke. But he had little thought either for the outward aspect of this noble thoroughfare, or for the thousand memories and associations that it naturally awakens. His heart was burning with a fierce desire for vengeance—vengeance on those who had taken away his young wife from him, and treated her so cruelly. And when he got to Moray Place, and found that the famous advocate was at home, he rejoiced in his wrath; retribution,

swift and dire, was now to be meted out, and that with a firm hand.

He was ushered into a long and lofty apartment which seemed to be partly a library and partly an ornithological museum; for above the shelves of books that went round the walls there ran a continuous glass-case filled with stuffed birds—mostly sea-birds from the northern coasts and isles—while on a table close up to one of the windows some skins were lying, along with all the implements of the taxidermist's art, pins, sealing-wax, colors, glass eyes, arsenic paste, and what not. Had his mind been less perturbed, he might have sought out in that collection certain specimens that he himself had contributed; but as it was he was waiting impatiently for the lawyer's appearance.

The door opened; Mr. Balwhinnan entered, bawling out a jovial and hearty greeting as he came forward to meet his friend. He was a man of about six feet two in height, spare of frame, with a long, thin clean-shaven face, a retreating forehead, an aquiline nose, sandy hair, fresh complexion, and gray eyes that were sufficiently merry and good-natured.

"And what's brought ye to Edinburgh, Macdonell?" he cried, as he hauled along a couple of chairs to the central table. "Man, that was a fine velvet duck you sent me—as handsome a fellow as ever I set eyes on; do you see him up yonder?"

Macdonell did not even glance in the direction indicated.

"Look here, Balwhinnan," said he, "I've come to ask you for advice in a very serious affair. You know Gemmill & Inglis do what little law-business we want done; but I could not go to them about this matter; I want the advice of a friend as well as a lawyer; you must tell me precisely what my position is, and what steps I am to take."

Then Ludovick Macdonell began and told his story; and it might have been remarked that during this narrative a singular change came over Mr. Balwhinnan's expression. He was no longer the bluff, hearty, sportsman-looking person who had noisily come into the room; his eyes had lost their merry good-nature and were keen and scrutinizing; his lips seemed to be thinner; and it may be added that if his forehead was distinctly retreating his head was long-shaped behind. Watchful and silent he sate, until the tale was told; and it was not for a second or two thereafter that he attempted to answer the younger man's appeal.

"My good fellow," said he, slowly, "you have certainly got yourself into a very extraordinary position, and the way out of it isn't as easy as you seem to imagine. I'm afraid the law is powerless to do what you want. You see, if it were the case of a child who was being kept back and concealed, and if you were

her legal guardian, you could petition the Court of Session for the custody of the child; you would get a warrant for her recovery, and if the person concealing her refused to hand her over, or refused to tell the court where she was, that person would forthwith find himself or herself in prison. But your wife is in the eyes of the law capable of acting for herself; she is away from you of her own free-will; and the law of Scotland gives the husband no power to compel his wife to live with him against her inclination. Of course," said he, with a swift look of inquiry, "I assume that she *is* away of her own free-will? You don't suppose that she is locked up anywhere and kept a prisoner by force?"

"No, no; that is too absurd," Macdonell said, hastily; "but if I admit that she is away of her own free-will, I mean that she has been subjected to all kinds of influences, that she has been misinformed and terrorized over; and what is more, I am perfectly certain of this, that if I could compel them to tell me where she is, if I could get to her, I should have no trouble at all in bringing her away from them. None. I know her too well. I know what they have been doing—"

"Yes, yes, my dear fellow," Mr. Balwhinnan said, bluntly, "but in the mean time you must take it that she is remaining away from you of her own choice.

Now, I am afraid it is English law that has been running in your head. In England the husband can not only bring a suit for the restitution of conjugal rights, and compel his wife to live with him, whether she is willing or not, but he can also bring an action for damages against any one who is foolish or daring enough to harbor her. Here it isn't so at all. In Scotland the law gives better protection to the wife who, for whatever reason, is resolved to remain apart from her husband; and not only that, but provision is made by which the marriage may be annulled—"

"Good heavens, man, what are you talking about!" Macdonell exclaimed, in sudden dismay. For was this the loop-hole of escape that Mrs. Cowan had spoken of? Perhaps she was not so ignorant after all. "You don't mean to say that a legal marriage can be dissolved for that reason alone?"

"In Scotland, yes," Mr. Balwhinnan replied, calmly. "And why not? It is a just and a reasonable statute. What is the use of compelling husband and wife to live together when either is unwilling? What happiness can result from that? Our Scotch law protects the wife, certainly; but it also gives the husband his remedy. It does not say that the wife, if she chooses, may remain apart from her husband and the husband still remain tied by the marriage-bond. No. That would be obviously and monstrosly unfair. What he is entitled

to do is to bring an action for adherence; then if she doesn't obey the order of the court—that is to say, if she refuses to come and live with him—at the expiry of four years he can get a divorce from her, and both are freed.”

“Do you mean that he can get a divorce from her for that reason alone?” Macdonell demanded, with not a little consternation—for it was becoming clear to him what the woman Cowan had meant.

“Undoubtedly,” was the lawyer's answer. “And that is all he can do. He has no compulsory power over her whatsoever. And that is the awkwardness of your position, my good friend. By George, I wish I could help you! But I can't; all the lawyers in the kingdom couldn't. What you've got to do is to find out for yourself where your wife is, and then you can reason with her, or perhaps get her away from any terrorism that may be held over her. But that is for herself to say; they cannot keep her, you cannot take her, against her will.”

Macdonell rose and began to pace up and down the floor in the greatest perplexity and perturbation.

“Oh, I know what she would do if I could only get hold of her hand for a moment!” he exclaimed, presently. “Do you think I don't know that? Do you think she married me for nothing? It was to be a bond

between us forever, just in case her friends should interfere. They have interfered; they have told her lies; they have frightened her with the horror and sanctimonious lamentation of those elders and their wives; then she has been accustomed to obey her father; and this she-devil of a woman has coaxed or wheedled or threatened her into compliance. I have no doubt she said to herself, 'Well, what does it matter? I will obey them; the bond between my husband and myself remains all the same; they cannot break that; and he will come and take me away before long.' And do you mean to tell me," he continued, passionately, "that I have no means of claiming my own? The law gives her to me, but gives me no power to claim her, even if she is willing to come! I cannot compel those people to say where she is? I cannot send them to jail if they refuse to tell me? There is the old man her father: he takes the whole responsibility on his shoulders; he comes forward and gives you to understand that it is his doing—and yet the law can neither make him speak nor punish him for refusing to speak? Is that the law?"

The long sandy-haired advocate answered, quietly enough, "If it is revenge you want, you can have it."

"Then I do want it!" the young man said, vehemently. "Not revenge—I don't want revenge—I want punishment. If that old Minister will not tell me where

Alison is, I want to see him lodged in jail—and kept there until he speaks!”

“Oh, you can do that,” Mr. Balwhinnan said. “But mind this, Macdonell, while I tell you, as a lawyer, what the law is, I don’t, as a friend, advise you to put it in operation. And there is no doubt you could have the old gentleman sent to prison, but it would be by means of a trick—well, I won’t precisely say that, but you could only proceed against him indirectly. What you would have to do would be to bring your action for adherence, then call him as a witness; he could be asked to say where his daughter was, and if the court ordered him to answer, and if—as is very likely, for those old Free Kirk fellows have stubborn wills where their conscience is concerned—if he refused to answer, he would assuredly be sent to prison for contempt.”

“Very well, then, I’ll have it done!” the young man said, with resolute lips.

The long lawyer lay back in his chair, and regarded his friend.

“Don’t you think,” he said, slowly, “that you could find some quieter way out of it? It would rather make a scandal, wouldn’t it? If you are so sure that the young lady would forsake them and come away with you if once you had the chance of removing certain

false impressions from her mind, wouldn't it be better to seek for that chance?"

"Bless my soul, how can I search all Scotland to find her?" the younger man cried. "And how do I know that she is in Scotland? They may have taken her abroad."

"I should imagine," Mr. Balwhinnan made answer, with professional serenity, "from all you have told me, that it is almost a matter of certainty she is under the guardianship of that Mrs. Cowan. Well, now, do you think a Lanarkshire farmer's wife is the kind of person to pay a flying visit to the south of Spain, or adventure on a voyage out to the Canaries? I should fancy you might try somewhere nearer home. What was the name of the farm you mentioned?"

"Corbieslaw."

"In the neighborhood of Kirk o' Shields?"

"Yes."

"Don't you think, now, you might pay a little attention to that farm-house?" the lawyer said, glancing at his friend. "A little prospecting about would do no harm. I wouldn't have any professional detective as yet; but you might get somebody to keep an eye on the place—"

"By Jove, Balwhinnan, that is a most sensible suggestion," Ludovick exclaimed, with eagerness, for his imagination was fired by the possibility of finding

Alison so near him, and so soon to be discovered and borne away in triumph—"a capital suggestion! I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll telegraph to her cousin Hugh, in Fort William—he's a great chum of mine—and he'll come through at once, and bring with him as well a young lad they have there, who has the cunning and the endurance of a wild-cat; and we'll see if we can't find out Alison among us. Hugh can come down to Oban by this evening's steamer, stay the night there, and catch the first train in the morning. Of course he will stop at Kirk o' Shields station, and I shall be there to meet him, even if I go through this evening—no, not this evening"—he corrected himself, with sudden remorse for his forgetfulness of this good friend's kindness to him. "No, I want you to dine with me this evening, Balwhinnan; will you?"

"Yes, I will," the other said, promptly; "for my wife is with her Wigtownshire friends at present. And as it is near lunch-time now, you'll just walk along with me to my club and we'll have a snack, and then I want you to look at some new additions to the Advocates' Library."

"All right," Macdonell said. "I'm always glad to drop in there, if only to have a glance at the standard that brave fellow brought home from Flodden Field."

"And there's another thing I want to say to you,

my young sir," the advocate continued, as the two of them were walking towards Prince's Street. "Mrs. Balwhinnan will be home again in a few days' time. Now, if you succeed in liberating the captive, I suppose—well, it's none of my business—but I should imagine you might be contemplating a little wedding-trip, just to get the young lady securely away from those people. In that case, she wouldn't be likely to have bridal travelling-dresses, and such things, eh? Well, if you want to have her nicely fitted out, just you bring her along to Moray Place, and she will be our guest for a few days, and Mrs. Balwhinnan will be delighted to be a mother to her; for of course she must go abroad with all due state and ceremony."

"Do you mean that?" Macdonell said, involuntarily stopping short for a second, and with his eyes flashing gratitude.

"I sometimes mean what I say, although I am a lawyer," the tall Sutherlandshire-looking man made answer, imperturbably, as he continued his long, measured stride across Charlotte Square.

But these anticipations were all too premature and roseate, as Ludovick Macdonell was soon to discover. When Hugh, accompanied by Johnny—who regarded this expedition into foreign countries as a very wonderful thing indeed—arrived in Kirk o' Shields, all three

set about their amateur-detective work with the greatest eagerness, and also with the certain conviction they must discover where Alison was concealed. But day by day went by, and they could find no clew whatsoever. They bribed the letter-carrier who traversed the Corbieslaw district; and Macdonell made the acquaintance of the modest and shy-eyed young lady who was behind the counter at the post-office; but the most cautious and discreet of questions met with no satisfactory reply. It was the especial charge of Johnny, as being a less conspicuous figure than Hugh or Ludovick, to keep an eye on Corbieslaw farm; and this duty he performed most faithfully; for, indeed, how could there be a more delightful occupation than to sit on the top of a stone dike, with one's hands in one's pockets, and with whole hours in which to whistle "The Hills of Glenorchy?" Nevertheless, this espionage did not wholly commend itself to Johnny's mind.

"What uss't Macdonell wants?" he said to Hugh, on one occasion, when Captain Ludovick chanced to be absent. "Does he want to put the auld wife into the pollus-offus?"

"Never you mind what he wants," Hugh made answer. "It's your business to find out whether Miss Alison is at the farm."

"If I wass Macdonell," said Johnny, in his cool

fashion, "I would find that out for myself—ay, before another hour wass over."

"And how could you find it out?" Hugh said, contemptuously.

"I would tek a stuck in my hand," said Johnny, "and I would go up to the farm, and I would go into the house, and I would go into every room in the house, and if any one tried to stop me I would hit him over the head with the stuck."

"Yes, you would have somebody in the police-office very soon—but it would be yourself."

"Cosh, but I would find out, though," John maintained, confidently. "Macdonell uss a strong man: with a stuck in his hand, who would try to stop him?"

However, both Hugh and Captain Ludovick were now inclining to the belief that neither Mrs. Cowan nor Alison was at Corbieslaw. Johnny brought reports about all the other people—the farmer himself, the fledgling minister, the men and women servants—but no one answering to the description of the farmer's wife had made her appearance; and it was unlikely she would have remained in-doors all this time had she been in the house. Their vigilant search was turned elsewhither, but with a distressing vagueness of aim. Mr. Balwhinnan's idea was that Mrs. Cowan and her charge would be found to have gone not very far away;

but in what direction? And the more Macdonell chafed at this enforced delay, the more helpless he felt himself, and the more he harrowed himself with baleful fancies as to all that Alison might be suffering, the more he returned to his sombre thoughts of vengeance.

“And that’s what it is coming to,” he said to Hugh, as they conversed together in the inn, of an evening, over the one all-engrossing subject. “That is what must be done. Oh, it’s all very well for you to talk of abstract right; but I want rough justice done; and justice says that if this old man will not tell me where Alison is, then let him go to jail! What do I care what the public say? I’m not thinking about the public; I’m thinking about Alison.”

“Why are you defending yourself so vehemently, Ludovick?” Hugh retorted, and also with some warmth. “Because you know that if you do this thing you will be acting wrongly and meanly, and in a way you will regret all your life. Why, according to your own version of the story, Alison’s father is to be respected: it is his conscience that refuses to tell you what you want to know.”

“His conscience!” Ludovick exclaimed. “Has he the only conscience in the world? But that’s the way with people who pride themselves on having a highly superior and sensitive conscience; they alone have such

a thing; other people haven't any! Their sense of right allows them to take away a young girl and treat her most cruelly; but if my sense of right tells me that I shall be a contemptible coward if I don't use every means in my power to prevent them so treating her, then I am to pay no heed to that? They've got all the conscience, then? Conscience only exists and lives in Kirk o' Shields, and in that congregation of whining Pharisees!"

"I can quite understand your anger, Ludovick," Hugh said, in his gentle way, and yet with a quiet firmness that seemed beyond his years, "and your impatience and indignation; but I tell you that if you set the law in operation against this old man, you will be doing the wrong thing. I shouldn't be your friend if I did not say so. It isn't right; you may talk and argue as much as you please, but it isn't the right thing. You would see that for yourself, if you weren't fancying every minute that Alison was being treated harshly. But do you think that probable? Do you think she is the sort of girl to submit tamely? Well, I don't. She could always hold her own with Aunt Gilchrist: is it likely she would let this Mrs. Cowan intimidate her?"

"I won't allow any man or woman to try!" young Macdonell said, with burning eyes. "No, not if I can step in to take her part!"

"But is it likely she is being badly treated?" Hugh said again. "Look at the letter that Mrs. Cowan wrote to Aunt Gilchrist."

"Yes!—and Alison before the whole congregation of them—crying."

"But apparently she is under Mrs. Cowan's charge now," Hugh continued; "and what motive could she have for treating Alison badly? Look at the letter. It was a slavish and despicable letter, no doubt, but it was all done to propitiate Aunt Gilchrist, and to keep her in the same mind as regards Alison and the money she intends to give her. Mrs. Cowan means to get that money for her son's wife: is she likely to do anything that would offend either Alison or Aunt Gilchrist?"

"Yes, but I want to know: I want to see for myself," the young husband said. "It seems to me I have some right to learn for myself what is going on. And I tell you this, that whoever stands in my way must take the consequences."

"Ludovick," said this gentle-voiced lad, "I dare say you don't care what people generally would say; but I want to ask you this: supposing you get your Edinburgh lawyers to bring the whole affair into court, and supposing that Mr. Blair refuses to answer, then no doubt he will have to suffer the consequences: but, Ludovick,

what will Alison think of the man who has sent her father to prison?"

Macdonell winced at this, and was silent for a moment or two; but then he said,

"I don't send him to prison. If he chooses to defy the law of the country, it is that sends him to prison. Why should he be exempted any more than any one else? If a man breaks into my house, and robs me, it isn't I who send him to prison; it is the law, that all of us have to obey. And why should this old Minister be exempt? If, out of pure pig-headed obstinacy, he courts imprisonment, why, let him have it!"

"Ludovick, you are not talking like yourself," Hugh said. "I wish to goodness we could find Alison; and if once you saw that she wasn't being ill-treated, you wouldn't have such a fierce desire for vengeance."

"But she *has* been ill-treated: and is no one to suffer for that?" the other demanded.

"At all events it is not for you, in the position you hold with regard to this old man, it is not for you to put the law in motion, and get him thrown into jail. I tell you it is not right," Hugh continued, with some emphasis. "It is not right; and if you do it, you will regret it as long as ever you live."

But even Hugh was puzzled to say what should be done, in face of the fact that despite all their search

and inquiry they could find no trace whatsoever of Mrs. Cowan and her ward. On the very next day, as it happened, Ludovick encountered Alison's sister Agnes, as he was walking along the unfrequented thoroughfare overlooking the canal and certain large iron-works. He was startled to see how ill the girl looked; and he might probably have passed her without recognition, had he not got into the habit of scanning eagerly every face he saw, even at a distance. When Agnes perceived who this stranger was, she started back in affright, and no doubt would have sought to avoid him, but that he intercepted her.

"Miss Agnes!" he said, as a sort of appeal.

"I—I should not speak to you," answered the girl, whose pale face was now paler than ever, and whose large and wistful eyes were like those of some startled wild animal.

"But you will speak to me—for Alison's sake!" he said. "Tell me where she is! That is all I want to know—it is not much for you to say!"

She glanced backward along the road; there was no one there but some children playing.

"If I knew I would tell you, indeed I would," she said, at once hurriedly and piteously. "Oh, Captain Macdonell, it is terrible to have Alison away like that—as if she were dead. Her name is never mentioned;

the letters you sent her are lying there unopened; I don't know where she is; and I dare not ask. And then it is so hopeless. If she were to come back, it would only be worse. You know how gentle and kind Alison always is; but she has a great deal of firmness, too, when she thinks she is in the right. And nothing will make her yield now: if she were to come back, she might be in the same house with my father, but they would not recognize each other; and I can look forward to nothing but misery—"

The girl's eyes filled with tears, for she was a sensitive, tremulous kind of creature; and she had been very fond of her sister.

"But why didn't Alison open my letters?" he demanded.

"They came after she left," was the answer. "She was sent away almost immediately—on the Monday morning after she had been prayed for in the church. Oh, it was terrible, her going away: I never saw my father look like that before—so stern and implacable: though he hardly said anything. It was Alison who spoke most; but she was quite quiet, though she was white as white; and she said that if he wished her to leave the house, she would go wherever Mrs. Cowan chose to take her; but she said that as soon as you came for her, it was her husband she would obey, and

no one else; and she would wait until you told her what you wished her to do—”

“She said that?” he exclaimed, quickly.

“Yes, indeed,” Agnes made answer. “And although she was crying when she left the house, I know it is useless for Mrs. Cowan to think she will talk her over. When Alison sees a thing clearly, and knows it to be right, nothing will make her yield about it; and if you were to go to her, Captain Macdonell, she would do what you asked her to do, because she said she would obey her husband; but it is hopeless for Mrs. Cowan to think she will persuade her into anything else—yes, and that’s why it is useless and hopeless to bring her back to Kirk o’ Shields—”

“Then she is not in Kirk o’ Shields?” he interposed, suddenly.

“I don’t know,” Agnes said, with the most obvious simplicity and sincerity—in truth, a more guileless face than that of this pale, delicate-looking, wistful-eyed girl could hardly be imagined. “Sometimes I think she cannot be, or some one would have seen her and told me. But her name is never mentioned in the house. It is just as if she were dead. Once or twice at family worship my father makes some reference that you might fancy applied to Alison; but that is only part of what he may be thinking himself; he says nothing openly;

and it's just as if she had never been in the house at all."

"And you have not the slightest idea where she is?" he asked again.

"No," said she, rather sadly, "none. But you—now you have come here—don't you think you will be able to find her?"

"Oh, I will find her," said he, with something more than confidence in his tone. "I may have an unpleasant duty to perform as a preliminary step; but I will undertake to find her."

"And when you do, Captain Macdonell, you will let me know?—you will tell me that Ailie is well—and—and perhaps a little happier than when she went away from us? If you knew what it has been to me to see all this trouble, and not to be able to help; and now I am quite alone; and I dare not mention her name. Ailie and I were always such close companions—"

She stopped, for her lips were tremulous.

"Oh, I'll find her out, never fear," he said, in a more gentle way, "and you shall be the first to know, depend on that. Alison herself will write to you; and when you hear from her you may be sure she is no longer in any kind of captivity, or being lectured or preached at in any way whatsoever."

“Good-by,” she said; and she would have gone on so, but that he remonstrated with her.

“Won’t you shake hands with me?”

Somewhat timidly the girl gave this dangerous person, this Roman Catholic, her hand; and then she so far overcame her shyness as to raise her eyes for a moment.

“Be kind to Ailie,” she said—these were her parting words as she turned and went hurriedly away.

It was with no little exultation that Ludovick now hastened back to the inn, where he found Hugh just arrived from the fruitless watchings and wanderings of the morning; and eagerly, as they sate over their frugal mid-day meal, he told his friend the story of this interview with Agnes, and its revelations. And now he was grown impatient of their amateur-detective work; he would forthwith go through to Edinburgh and put the case, under this new light, before Balwhinnan, who would advise him what to do next. Moreover, he no longer spoke of vengeance; he was only anxious to release Alison from captivity; and what he insisted on was that if the courts were put in motion, and Mr. Blair summoned as a witness, the old Minister would say where Alison was as a matter of course, for the simple reason that he must know, after Alison’s de-

claration, that detaining her under any kind of guardianship was absolutely useless. But Hugh warmly protested.

“Depend on this, Ludovick, that he will not be affected by any considerations of that kind. He will refuse to be a party to handing his daughter over to a Roman Catholic; and he will suffer anything rather than yield. What will be the result? The court must punish him for contempt, to uphold its own dignity: you will have sent him to prison whether you intended it or not. And I tell you you will be sorry—sorrier than you think now. Why should you do such a thing? You don’t imagine, after what Agnes has said, that Alison is being ill-treated; and you don’t call out for vengeance on account of what she has suffered. Very well, let us take peacefuller means; and don’t send that old man to prison! Let us go to Edinburgh and get a couple of professional detectives, if you like. But not till to-morrow. I have my eye on a house in Coat-bridge Street that that divinity student fellow has called at twice during the last three days, and there is a backyard to it, with a high stone-wall round it, where a couple of prisoners might easily get a little exercise unseen. I still think Mr. Balwhinnan was right, and that you’ll find Mrs. Cowan is not so far away. Wait till to-morrow in any case; and then we can go to

Edinburgh and see about getting some professional help."

However, as it chanced, it was no professional detective who discovered a clew to the whereabouts of Mrs. Cowan and Alison: it was the lad John. Johnny, on this same afternoon, was as usual prowling about the neighbourhood of Corbieslaw, but quite carelessly now, for he had become convinced that Mrs. Cowan and Alison were not at the farm. And Johnny was angry that he had spent so much time for nothing; for Ludovick Macdonell, in order to render him diligent, had said something encouraging about his astuteness; and Johnny did not like the idea of going back to Lochaber a confessed failure. On this particular evening, towards dusk, he happened to observe, at a considerable distance, the figure of the "stickit minister," who was coming along the road towards the farm; and by some lucky accident, some flash of inspiration, a daring design sprung into Johnny's brain. The fields in this part of the country are divided from the highway, not by hedges, but by big solid stone-walls, the gate in which is made of strips of iron. Johnny instantly went and opened one of these gates just so far as to let himself through; and there he crouched down behind the wall and waited in the gathering dusk for the coming of the probationer. The Rev. James

Cowan, dreaming of no harm—dreaming, perhaps, of the brighter days in store for him when he should be released from the baleful tyranny of his father, and set up in an establishment of his own in Edinburgh, with Alison as his house-mistress, and this congregation and that vying with each other as to the earnestness of their “call” to him—the Rev. James Cowan came along the black pathway, and passed the partly opened gate without thought of harm. But hardly had he passed when Johnny, issuing from his concealment, followed with one or two swift and stealthy steps, and then with a sudden, startling cry, sprang like a wild-cat on the shoulders of the hapless probationer, hurling him forward, prone, on the path-way, and pinning him face downward with a grip of two muscular hands on his throat.

“*Heeg-a-neesh!—heeg-a-neesh!*”* he yelled, while the luckless minister, frightened out of his wits, in vain attempted to free himself from this horrible incubus. “The Duffle is on you!—the big Duffle is on you!—tell me now where Miss Alison is—where is she?—tell me now, or the Duffle, the Duffle will hef your head off!”

Again and again the captive strove to cast off this

* “*Thig-a-nis!*”—Come along, now.

terrible unknown thing that had seized him; but the weakly, white-faced, ill-made probationer was no match for this heavy-shouldered demon of a lad, whose hands were as hard as iron with rowing. To save himself from actual strangulation, the black-coated youth gasped out,

“She—she’s in Portobello.”

“What place is that?” Johnny cried, with ferocious determination. “Tell me again now, or the Duffle will hef your head off!—the Duffle, the Duffle hass you!—tell me again—what place is it?”

“Port—Portobello!” the probationer managed to ejaculate, as well as Johnny’s iron fingers would allow him—and the next moment he found himself free.

But long before the bewildered and stupefied minister could pull himself together, Master Johnny was flying down the road towards Kirk o’ Shields, shrieking with eldritch laughter, and calling aloud from time to time the talismanic word in his wild delight.

“Portobello!—aw, it’s Portobello, uss it; and a fine name too! Aw, a fine name that! And what will Macdonell say now? Cosh, that fellow’s aweh hom; and he’s thinking the big Duffle was on his back; but Macdonell will be giffing me something for this night’s work. Portobello!—aw, Cosh, it’s a fine place, Portobello, if I will be getting any money for it! Go aweh

hom, you black-cotted fellow, and tell them what the Duffle wass doing to you in the middle of the rod! Hurrah, now, and another hurrah!—there wass no one could find it out but myself; and the Duffle wass a good friend to me this night!”

CHAPTER XI.

A BATTLE ROYAL.

LUDOVICK MACDONELL had of course heard of Portobello, but he had never been there, nor had Hugh; and both of them, imagining it to be merely an ordinary small sea-side village, thought they would have no difficulty in finding Alison and carrying her off from her temporary jailer. So, when they went through to Edinburgh, they did not think of going to see Mr. Balwhinnan; they were in too great a hurry; they left their things at the hotel where Macdonell was known; they hired an open fly that happened to be coming along Prince's Street at the moment; and by-and-by they found themselves rattling through the rather melancholy eastern suburbs of the city, and out into the pallid semblance of the country that was all vague and dismal under the haze of a north-east wind.

But when they drew near to Portobello, and when they had got through the smoke of its outlying potteries and gas-works, and entered the old-fashioned, Scotch-

looking town, and still more when they left the fly behind them, and walked down to the sea-front, and found the long extent of brown sand literally swarming with holiday-makers, mostly women and children, they perceived that this was a far bigger place than they had bargained for, and that their task was not to be so extremely simple. Macdonell had looked with intensest interest as they passed at each of those little villas, with its front of black-gray stone and small garden; for any one of them might hold the prisoner he was come to liberate; and it was strange to think that perhaps this or that door was the only thing that intervened between him and Alison. But when they got down to the beach, the sight of the big modern houses and the swarming population rather chilled his eager hopes; and when they walked out the pier—which seemed a kind of fashionable promenade—he grew familiar with disappointment, as stranger after stranger came nearer, and passed by unheeded. Nor was the day one to exhilarate the spirits and cheer him with fond anticipations. The bleak north-easter had brought mist with it, so that Inchkeith rock was just visible and no more; but the wind was not strong enough to raise anything of a sea, and the wide waste of desolate gray water lapped languidly into the shore, where it took a tinge of muddy brown from the sand.

The flashing blue waves, the silver-gleaming clouds, the wild rain of the west had no place here; everything was gray and cold and dull; it seemed impossible to him that Alison should be anywhere in this nebulous, fluctuating, uninteresting throng.

"Oh, don't be so hopeless all at once!" Hugh said to him. "That is only a first impression. It won't be so difficult; we must find her, now that we know where she is. Johnny," he said, turning to the lad, who was but a step behind them, "you don't suppose the stickit minister was playing a trick on you when he said Portobello?"

"Uss it a trick?" said Johnny, brightening up at once. "Cosh, there wass no trick in his head when he thought the Duffle wass on his shoulders! Ay, and he's thinking that now, I'm sure, and it will be a fine thing for him to tell them from the pulpit—that he wass fighting with the Duffle in the middle of the rod!"

Hugh turned to his companion.

"What we have to do is this," said he, "we must take rooms in that small hotel we passed, and have our things sent down from Edinburgh. You know now all that you want to know; Alison is here; and she is ready to go with you whenever you ask her to do that. Of course we must see her sooner or later

walking about, or coming out of a house, or going into one: and we must have a fly waiting in readiness at the hotel, so that she may be taken away with as little fuss as possible. There will be a fuss, no doubt, if Mrs. Cowan is with her at the time—there will be a mighty row, in fact; for although she can't prevent your taking Alison away, she can make a scene, and give you a bit of her mind. You'll get the worst of that, Ludovick," he continued, with rather a grim smile. "You'll decidedly get the worst of that; if I were you, I wouldn't say a word. By George, I'd give something to have Aunt Gilchrist here just at that moment; then you'd see the fur fly! I'd back the Highland bantam to make a poor thing of the Southerner—unless, indeed, Mrs. Cowan went on the other tack, and began to whine. She won't whine with you, Ludovick, you may be sure you will have it served up hot and hot."

"I am not likely to mind that much," Ludovick said, indifferently, "if once I had got hold of Alison. But the worst of it is that we haven't the slightest idea what this woman Cowan is like; we might meet her half a dozen times without knowing it; our only chance is to find Alison herself."

"And of course we shall find her," Hugh said, instantly (for he was always afraid of Macdonell returning to his project of appealing to the law, and compelling the old Minister to speak, or else to go to jail). "This

isn't like an ordinary town; they are sure to come out for a walk, and they are sure to stroll along the sea-front, or out this pier. Now let us have a distinct understanding; if you can get clear away with Alison, you put her in the cab, and drive off with her to Edinburgh; if there's any row, leave Johnny and me to see it out. Once you've put Alison under Mrs. Balwhinnan's care—that's the proposal, isn't it?—there will be no chance of further trouble; you won't catch Mrs. Cowan hammering at an advocate's door and screaming for the police. She must know well enough that you have the law on your side; I don't believe she's half the ignorant person you seem to think her. And here is Johnny all impatience to begin a search of the town; you're determined to win that gun, aren't you, Johnny?"

"I wass thinking that if Miss Alison uss in this place, I will be finding her before long," observed Johnny, who was rather giving himself airs now since his exploit on the highway.

"If you do," Ludovick said to this heavy, lumbering, shrewd-eyed lad, "I'll not only give you the gun, but you may come out from time to time to Oyre, and if you find any hoodie-crows along the rocks, I'll give you a shilling for every one you kill."

"A shullin?" said John, quickly.

"Yes."

"And mebbe you'll be for giffing me a few cartridges," said John, insidiously.

"Oh yes, I'll give you a few cartridges, now and again, but not to be fired away in the air, or at marks. You'll have to stalk the hoodie-crows; for they're precious cunning, and when you get at one of the brutes, you shoot him sitting, mind that, or anyhow you can manage it."

"Well, he may be cunning," said John, reflectively, "but mebbe there's other folk chist as cunning as him. I've caught a snail by the horns before now—though I could not throw the little duffle over my shoulder."

And, indeed, as it turned out, it was Johnny's proud privilege to secure that precious gun, and that in a far more simple way than any one of them had hoped for. Ludovick and Hugh were walking back through the town towards the hotel which has been mentioned, when Johnny, who was lingering behind them somewhat, suddenly saw a face present itself at the window of one of the small villas they were passing, and then there was a quick rapping on the framework, and also, as he thought, a half-stifled cry. Instantly he called to the two in front of him.

"Here!—here!—Mr. Hugh!"

They wheeled round. But Johnny could say nothing; he was frightened; he was staring at the window, which was now quite empty. And then—it all

seemed to happen in one brief bewildering second—the door of the house was thrown open, and there stood Alison, rose-red and smiling, and yet with anxious and pleading eyes. Ludovick was up the steps and by her side in a moment, and holding her by both hands.

“Have you come for me, Ludovick?—are you going to take me away with you?” she said; but the proud and glad light that shone in her eyes showed that she knew what his answer would be.

“Indeed, I have come for you,” said he, and he drew her a little way into the passage. It seemed a wonderful thing to see Alison’s face upturned to his again, and her soft eyes all radiant, and her lips smiling: this was not the tear-worn Alison he had been thinking of; this was rather the happy bride, rose-red and shy, and yet blithe of look, who had come sailing away with him on board the steamer. “And I’m going to take you away with me, you may be sure of that—now, this very minute. But what are you doing in this place, Alison? What brought you here? When you left your father’s house, why didn’t you come straight through to the Highlands?”

“Ludovick,” said she, with her eyes cast down, “how could I do that—unasked?”

“Then why didn’t you write to me?”

“Wouldn’t that have been just about the same

thing?" she said, gently; and then she looked up again—trustful and confident. "But I knew you would come for me, Ludovick!"

"Yes, I've had a long search for you, Alison; but now I've found you I don't mean to lose sight of you any more. You must come away at once. I suppose Mrs. Cowan is not in the house?"

"She went out only a few minutes ago, but she may be back again directly," Alison said, with some apprehension appearing on her face. "Shall I go and get my things ready, Ludovick? I—I would rather be away before she came back."

"Oh, as for that," said he, "it is of no consequence to me if there were fifteen dozen of Mrs. Cowans in the house: you are coming away with me, and that is all about it. But we may as well get you away quietly if we can. I see Hugh has disappeared: he is off to get a cab, I know, and he will be back presently. And here is Johnny; you go and get your portmanteau ready, Alison, and Johnny will be waiting to carry it down to the fly."

She hurried away at once; and then Ludovick called to Johnny, who came up the steps grinning with satisfaction, for now he knew the gun was secured, likewise the cartridges, and the stalking of hoodie-crows.

"Look here, Johnny," said he, "you go along and

stand at the foot of that stair. There will be a portmanteau for you to fetch down from the room above, and you will have to carry it out to the cab when it comes. Mind you don't let any one interfere with you."

"Cosh, will there be a fight?" exclaimed Johnny, with eager and delighted eyes.

"Of course not. Only, don't let any one stop you. Drive you right through and get the portmanteau out and into the cab."

Presently an open fly was driven up, and here was Hugh, very anxious and excited.

"Isn't she ready? Isn't she ready?" he said, breathlessly.

"There's no such great hurry," Macdonell said, quite calmly. "Even if my amiable friend Mrs. Cowan turns up, what can she do?"

"You don't know what she mayn't do. She has the tremendous advantage of being a woman. If there's any kind of a difficulty, you can't knock her out of the way as you might a man. However, if Alison would only look sharp, it will be all right. What a lucky chance it is!"

Indeed, all was going well; for now they heard Alison calling Johnny to come and get down the portmanteau. Moreover, a domestic who had been summoned from some back region by this unusual commo-

tion, having stood and gazed at these strangers for a second or two, quietly retired again: she evidently thought it was none of her business. But alas! as ill fate would have it, just as it seemed probable they were going to get easily and freely away, Mrs. Cowan appeared upon the scene; and she had not even entered the house when she seemed to divine what was going on.

“Hoity, toity, what’s this now?” she exclaimed, with eyes sparkling with anger; and she confronted Ludovick and Hugh in the lobby. All her cringing and servile suavity was gone now; she saw the position clearly enough; she knew that if once the girl was allowed to leave the house, then farewell to all the fond mother’s hopes about the poor probationer and his prospects; this was her last chance, and she was prepared to do battle for it. “Here’s impudence!” she cried. “I’d just like to know what you’re doing in a respectable woman’s house! Well, I declare!—”

“I have come to take away my wife,” Ludovick said, politely enough, “if that is what you want to know.”

“Oh, it’s you, then,” she said, with rather panting expression—for the crisis had found her unprepared with sufficiently cutting phrases—“it’s you, then, that led astray that poor girl, and would have made a Roman of her, and a Jezebel, and—and—worse. But

you've not done it yet; and you'll no do it; for we've the law on our side; and not a foot will she stir out o' this house, or my name's no Cowan."

"I'm sure I don't know what your name is," Macdonell said, "and I don't care very much; but my wife is going away with me—now—this minute."

"She's not!—she's not!" the woman cried, fiercely—for the sight of Johnny bringing the portmanteau down-stairs seemed to drive her frantic. "I'll have the law; I'll bring a policeman; you're stealing these things—you're stealing them! She's under my charge; I'll no have her carried off by a gang o' Roman Catholics and thieves!"

At this moment Alison appeared, and Mrs. Cowan instantly turned to face her—barring her way, indeed.

"I dare ye to leave this house!" she cried. "Ye're the daughter of an honest, God-fearing man, and I dare ye to go forth and bring shame on him and his house and his congregation!"

"Let me pass, Mrs. Cowan," said Alison, who was very pale.

"I will not—I will not!" this infuriated person cried. "Ye're under my charge; out o' this house ye'll not budge one step. I'll take ye back to your room myself—"

"If you lay a hand on her," Ludovick said—and

his eyes were beginning to flash fire now—"it will be the worst day for you you ever encountered in your life!"

But she was not to be intimidated.

"Back to your room, miss!" she said, and she seized the girl by the wrist.

Well, here an extraordinary thing occurred. Johnny, by some mischance, happened at this very moment to trip over the portmanteau, which was lying in the lobby, and he fell forward against Mrs. Cowan—fell forward, indeed, with such violence and weight that she was sent staggering against the parlor door, which yielded, so that she stumbled backward into the room, while the heavy-shouldered lad, carried on by the impetus of his fall, rolled in after her. Instantly there was a frightful shrieking and scrimmage; but Hugh clapped to the door, and held the handle.

"Quick now, Ludovick! whip up the portmanteau, and be off with you! Get into the cab, Alison! Leave Johnny and me to come along afterwards: look sharp—or she'll have him killed!"

Ludovick with his powerful arms seized the portmanteau, carried it down the steps and across the pavement, and swung it up to the driver; he opened the door and helped Alison into the fly; then they drove away, and Hugh waited until they were well out of sight. Just as they disappeared round a distant corner, Ludovick looked back and waved his hand: he was

laughing — doubtless over Johnny's achievement; but Alison, Hugh could perceive, still seemed frightened and was very pale. Then he thought it was time for him to open the parlor door, and see what was going on within.

But the battle raged no longer. The combatants were exhausted. Mrs. Cowan had thrown herself on the sofa, her face downward on the cushion, and she was sobbing hysterically; while her dress was in dire disarray. Johnny, on the other hand, stood erect, irate, and vengeful, regarding his enemy with lowering eyes; but he too was in woful plight—his collar hanging from his neck, his waistcoat torn open, and blood streaming profusely from two terrible scratches that extended from his right temple all down the side of his face.

"Come away, Johnny — come away!" his master said to him.

But Johnny lingered.

"I wass giffing that tammed ——— something she will remember," he said, between his teeth, as he still regarded his prostrate foe. "Does she want any more?"

There was no response from the sobbing and dishevelled figure on the sofa.

"Come away, John, I tell you!"

But even when he had in a fashion dragged him out of the house, Hugh could not induce Johnny to go any farther.

"That tammed ——" he said, sullenly, as he was mopping his face with his handkerchief, "she had her nails in my neck. I'm not going back to Edinburgh just yet, Mr. Hugh, I know the weh there ferry well. I'm going to stay here until it is dark; and when it is dark I will go back. She's an ahfu' woman, that; but, by Cosh, I wass giffing her something!"

"What on earth do you want to stay here till it is dark for?" Hugh demanded, with some impatience.

"I want to bash the windows with stons," said Johnny, gloomily regarding the house.

"Yes, and get locked up in the police-office!"

"That is no matter," was all that John said.

Eventually, however, he was forced to come away with Hugh: and when they caught a tram-way car, and got on the top of the same, Hugh set to work magnanimously to convince John that he had not fared worst in that fell duel.

"But just remember this, Johnny," Hugh Munro said to this extremely disreputable-looking lad, whose torn collar could not be made to come together again. "Consider what you've done. You've broken into a house, and carried off a portmanteau, and let a minister's daughter run away, and committed assault and battery, and I don't know what else. You'll be very well out of it if you get safely back to Lochaber. What would you say now if you were taken before a judge in Edin-

burgh—a terrible person in a big white wig and silk robes—and if you were charged before him, what would you say?”

“Well,” said Johnny, with the most imperturbable coolness, “I would tell him I wass giffing that tammed —— as much as she wass giffing me; and if he did not like the answer, I would tell him to do what wass his pleasure. For you know what they say in the Gaelic, Mr. Hugh—‘*Is coma leis an rìgh Dùghall, is coma le Dùghall co dhùibh.*’” *

* “The King hates Dugald, but Dugald does not care a straw for that.”

CHAPTER XII.

AGNES.

WHAT strangely unexpected strands appear in this web of life we weave from day to day. When Alison Macdonell was walking through the luxuriant gardens of Monaco, between branching palm and towering cactus, and looking down the steep cliffs to the intense opaque blue of the Mediterranean Sea basking in the noonday sun, her thoughts would go wandering away back to the grimy little Scotch town, with its rain, its squalid streets and smoke-laden skies; when she stood in the mysterious dusk of Milan Cathedral, and beheld the enthroned cardinals in their robes of purple and red, and listened to the distant sound of trumpet and viol and bassoon leading the hushed invisible choir, she would think (and with no kind of disrespect or contempt) of the bare walls and cold pews of East Street Church, and of the harsh voices of men singing, "Be merciful to me, O God" to the melancholy strains of "Coleshill" or "Bangor;" and even with her young husband by her side, laughing, talking, proud of her,

assiduous in his devotion to her, and studying her every wish with a constant kindness, her heart would turn with a sort of piteous longing for reconciliation to the stern old man who had shut the door of his house upon her forever. Ludovick did not seek to argue her out of these wistful regrets, though sometimes he good-naturedly remonstrated.

“Look here, Ailie,” he would say, but very gently, “each person has to go his or her own way in the world; and I think, after you have got back to Lochaber, and are settled down there, and have got acquainted with the many families who will be delighted to become your friends, I think you will find yourself leading a far more wholesome and natural life than ever you did in Kirk o’ Shields. Of course, if your father were disposed to make it up with us, I should be very glad. I should be very glad for several reasons; among them, I should like to have your sister Agnes come often to stay with us at Oyre. But if he won’t relent, then obstinacy and bigotry must simply be allowed to go their own way—as we go ours.”

“Yes, Ludovick,” she would say, submissively; and she would strive to be wholly engrossed with the various details and experiences of their travelling, though he came to the conclusion that time alone would effectually clear away these sad fancies, these unspoken regrets, from her mind.

However, when they did eventually return home to Fort William and to Oyre House, the general welcome that awaited the young bride (which involved them in a series of visits, oftentimes to distant parts of the country), and the new and unfamiliar duties devolving upon Alison herself, were of themselves a fortunate distraction. Armed as she was with a tolerable notion of house-keeping, she had much to learn in this extended sphere; and she was in many ways a shifty and business-like young person, who had early acquired a sense of responsibility; so that Ludovick used laughingly to declare that Aunt Gilchrist's "bit lady" was developing into a solemn and awful *châtelaine* who ought to go about in stiff black satin, with the keys of an *oubliette* dangling from her girdle. But Alison was exceedingly proud when the success of this or the other modest little festivity at Oyre called forth gentle and polished but none the less sincere praises from the old laird, who, indeed, was now so given to talking of his daughter-in-law wherever he went, and of her beautiful nature, her affectionate disposition, her persuasive ways, her simplicity, and self-possession, and charm of manner, that he had hardly any time left for his Indian stories. And then again, if Alison had fallen in love with the West Highlands in the summer-time, consider what she thought of them in the gorgeous hues of late October. In summer the West Highlands, when they are not

darkened by black rain-storms from the west, become faint and ethereal in the haze produced by fine weather; the mountains recede behind a veil, as it were, through which you can see the pale lilac-grays and rose-grays of their lofty peaks and shoulders, with the shadows traced in lightest blue; but in the colder and clearer atmosphere of late October, when the brackens of the lower slopes have turned to orange, and the bent-grass of the higher slopes has withered, the hills come startlingly near, and are of a solid russet-red, with every corrie and watercourse sharply marked in deep cobalt; while as the afternoon wanes, and the skies richen in intensity, the wide calm stretch of sea becomes a lake of crimson fire. With these splendors before her, Alison could not always be thinking of Kirk o' Shields.

Aunt Gilchrist, who tarried long in Fort William this autumn, apparently for no other reason than to catch an occasional glimpse of her bit lady, whom she had befriended in a most substantial manner—Aunt Gilchrist, it was observed, would never come near Oyre House when there were any strangers or any formal dinner-party there. She affected to be a little shy. If Hugh and Flora only were going out to have an afternoon game of tennis and to spend the evening, she would sometimes accompany them; and she had struck up a great friendship with Mr. Macdonell; but she kept away from Alison's new set of acquaintances. She

said she was just a foolish old Scotchwoman (which was not true, for she was Highland to the backbone) who had so long been accustomed to have her own way in her own small circle, that she did not care to go among strangers; and when Ludovick teased her by saying he knew why she would not accept these invitations—that it was because, after her goodness to Alison, she did not wish to come forward publicly to exact too much of their humble devotion and homage—she would answer significantly,

“I’ve seen more o’ the world than you, young sir; and when I promised my dear that she would go properly provided to Oyre House—that I would come and be a mother-in-law to you whenever you wanted me—I knew at the same time that a mother-in-law has to be discreet in her visits. I’ve done nothing for my bit lady but what I said I would; ye’re not obleeged to me the least thing; I’m happy enough when I hear her drive up to the gate, and when I look out and see her blithe face coming through the garden.”

The fact was that just at this time Aunt Gilchrist’s chief companion was John. The little old dame betrayed a most unholy joy in hearing the minutest details of the encounter between John and Mrs. Cowan; she laughed aloud at the picture of her adversary’s overthrow; she spurred on Johnny’s imagination until his recital, elaborated day after day, rose to epic heights.

At first John had been chary of bragging. Despite all his nonchalance, there remained with him some dim vision (conjured up by Hugh's warning) of an Edinburgh judge, sitting in awful court, and with knit brows inquiring into the story of the Portobello outrage. But at home here in Lochaber he grew to disregard these vague terrors; and the more Aunt Gilchrist—chuckling, crowing, making merry over the downfall of her direst enemy—the more Aunt Gilchrist encouraged him, the more did John, with his small eyes twinkling, and his large mouth grinning, add vivid particulars to his description of the fray. He took no shame to him that his victory had been obtained over a woman. Have not other heroes been in the like case? Did not the famous and valiant Siegfried strive with and overcome that “devil's-wife,” the fierce Brunehild? The *Portobello Lied* grew in proportions, until, from being the mere account of a cockatoo-and-monkey scrimmage, it became a great heroic poem, something that seemed to demand a lamenting or joyful chorus at the end of its several parts. And the first thing that caused Johnny to rise to these altitudes of invention was his inquiry about the probable cost of Mrs. Cowan's bonnet.

“Well, Mem,” he said to Aunt Gilchrist, while as yet the chant of triumph was in embryo, “when she put her nails into the back of my neck, I had a grup

of her too; and if she tore my collar, well, I pulled her bonnet in pieces, and what is more as that, Mem, when it came off all her front hair came off too—”

“That was false hair, Johnny, I’ll be bound,” said Aunt Gilchrist, sniggering to herself. “So the plaits came off, did they?”

“Ay, but this is what I would like to know, now; I would like to know what she would be paying for that bonnet that I tore into bits?” Johnny asked. “Two shullins, mebbe?”

“Two shillings? what are you talking about?”

“Mebbe more as that? Mebbe seffen or echt shullins?” said Johnny, eagerly. “Seffen or echt shullins?”

“More likely a pound, or five-and-twenty shillings!” answered Aunt Gilchrist—and she, too, was chuckling over the destruction of this piece of property.

“Five-and-twenty shullins!” exclaimed Johnny—awe-struck in the midst of his delight. “Five-and-twenty shullins!” And then he burst out laughing. “Aw, Cosh, that’s a fine thing, now! Five-and-twenty shullins! That’s a good story now as ever I wass hearing! Five-and-twenty shullins! I will be telling that story to Macdonell when I go out to get the gun he was promising me.”

Johnny not only got the gun and a moderate amount of cartridges, but also permission to shoot an occasional

rabbit or two when the Munroes could let him go out to pay a visit to Oyre; and it was quite remarkable how many rabbits seemed to get in John's way. He entirely failed to find any hoodie-crows; but proud indeed was Johnny when he could present the young mistress of Oyre with two or three rabbits, their legs neatly tied together with a piece of string. He would not take them into the back premises and give them to the cook; he lay in wait for Alison; and she, knowing what this murderous youth most valued, made no scruple about going into her husband's gun-room and filching from the case another handful of cartridges which she surreptitiously conveyed to John. These two were excellent friends; but Johnny got no encouragement from her to relate and magnify his onslaught upon Mrs. Cowan: the *Portobello Lied* was for Aunt Gilchrist's ears alone.

The flaming month of October burned itself out; Aunt Gilchrist had now gone away to the Rothesay Hydropathic Establishment, to settle herself there for the winter; and yet no message of any kind, no proffered word of conciliation, had come to Alison from the inexorable old man in Kirk o' Shields. Agnes was her correspondent; and Agnes wrote frequently, saying smooth things and assuring her sister that in time her father would relent; but Alison could tell, even from

these letters, that her name was never mentioned, that in her old home she was as one dead and departed forever. Mrs. Cowan was a good deal about the house, she learned. She had been instrumental in getting the servant-lass Jean dismissed—Jean having imprudently made some slighting remark about the length of the prayers at family worship; and Mrs. Cowan had brought down from Corbieslaw a girl to supply Jean's place, the new-comer being of a much more pious turn, though her godliness was more in evidence than her cleanliness. And every one of these letters wound up with the piteous hope that soon Alison might find some means of winning over her father from his rigid and austere isolation, showing how this gentle, nervous, sensitive creature Agnes was fretting about that unhappy estrangement.

Suddenly those letters ceased; and Alison, wondering, wrote again and again, without getting any answer. Then she became alarmed. She went to her husband, and asked him whether she might not write to Mrs. Cowan; and she probably would have done so had not a telegram arrived from Kirk o' Shields that confirmed her worst fears. She looked at it, breathless and dismayed. "*Your sister is seriously ill. She wishes to see you. Ebenezer Blair.*" She did not stay to consider that here was an intimation from her father that his

house was again open to her; she was not thinking of herself at all; she was not thinking only of the frail, delicate, wistful-eyed girl who had such a slight physique with which to combat any attack of disease. And when she hurriedly, and with rather a pale, frightened face, carried this telegram to her husband, she could not tell him all the anxious forebodings that were in her mind.

“You must go at once,” Ludovick said, “and I will go with you. We will put up at the inn, so that we need not be in any one’s way. Of course, Ailie,” he added, “I am very sorry your sister is ill; and I hope it may be only something temporary; but there’s this to be said about it—it has made it easy for your father and you to become friends again. People forget bygones in the face of such a crisis. And I know you have been worrying and vexing yourself about it—far more than ever you would tell me: well, here is the beginning of a reconciliation. He himself asks you to go to the house; whereas he might have got Mrs. Cowan to send you the telegram—”

“I do not care about that,” she said, sadly. “I’m afraid Agnes must be very ill.”

And thus it was that Alison found herself once more in Kirk o’ Shields, on the afternoon of a bleak

and cold November day, just as the daylight, or what passes there for daylight, was falling into a sombre dusk. The people at the inn knew that the Minister's daughter was seriously ill. It was some kind of fever, they said. She had been prayed for in the church on the preceding Sabbath. But there was something in the guarded way they spoke that alarmed Alison more than their words.

Forthwith she walked hurriedly along to East Street and to her father's house, and was admitted by the new servant-girl, Ludovick accompanying her. When she went up-stairs and entered her sister's room (which used to be her room, too) the gas was already lit; her father was standing talking in low tones to the doctor; Mrs. Cowan sate by the side of the bed; an open Bible lay on the small table. The moment she made her appearance, Mrs. Cowan rose and retired to the upper end of the room; and Alison went forward on tiptoe, and knelt down by the bedside. Apparently her sister was asleep—at least her eyes were closed; her face was pale and wan and sunken; she was breathing heavily, and with sometimes a kind of shudder that seemed to pass through the wasted frame; and when Alison ever so gently put her hand on the back of her sister's hand, there was a cold clamminess there that struck a mortal dread to her heart.

At that slight touch the girl opened her eyes—languid they were, and anxious too, and almost frightened, but there was no fierce fire of fever in them, as Alison was rejoiced to perceive.

“Have you just come, Ailie?” she said, in a weak, uncertain voice, as if breathing were difficult to her. And then she said, with a kind of troubled look, “I thought you were here last night, Ailie, but—but sometimes I don’t quite know the difference between dreaming and waking: my head is so strange. Is—is your husband here?”

“Yes, he is in the parlor,” Alison said, quickly. “Would you like to see him, Aggie?”

“Yes.”

Alison went down-stairs at once, and fetched Ludovick—who came forward to the bedside without paying heed to any one in the room. Curiously enough, at sight of him, the large, languid eyes of the sick girl filled with tears.

“Come nearer,” she said.

He stooped down to listen.

“You’ll be kind to Ailie!” she said, in a piteous kind of way.

“We all try to be as kind to her as we can,” said he, cheerfully. “But it is you who have got to be kind to her now. Ever since she came to Oyre, she has

been wondering when you were coming to pay us a visit—a long, long visit, so that she can show you all the wonderful things in Lochaber. And that is what you have got to do now—you must make haste to get strong and well, and as soon as the doctor allows you, we'll see what the change will do for you, and the Highland air, and Alison's nursing."

She only shook her head mournfully; and turned away from them; and once more closed the tired, heavy eyes.

Alison had thrown aside her bonnet and travelling-ulster on entering the house; and as Mrs. Cowan had now left the room, it seemed so natural that the elder sister of the patient should take the place of nurse that the doctor, before going, came forward to her, and in an undertone gave her directions as to what she should do. Down below he found Alison's husband in the parlor; and Macdonell, being anxious to hear all about the case, went outside with him, and walked some distance with him. The report he received was far from satisfactory. She had no strength of constitution to fight this nervous fever, the doctor said. She had been delirious several times. Though apparently she slept now and again, it was not real sleep; it was only a sort of dozing, during which her brain seemed to be racked by all kinds of terrors and visions. Ludovick

asked him whether there was any immediate danger; and the doctor somewhat evasively admitted that he feared there was.

Meanwhile Alison had been left alone with her father in the hushed sick-chamber; and now the old man with the sad, worn face had drawn his chair in to the table, and was reading aloud in solemn, monotonous tones, the Thirty-eighth Psalm, that perchance some phrase of petition or confession or consolation might reach that troubled brain. “O Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath: neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over my head: as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me.” And still more impressively he read out the closing verses, as if he also were joining in this appeal for Divine pity and succor. “Forsake me not, O Lord: O my God, be not far from me. Make haste to help me, O Lord my salvation.”

In the silence that ensued, the sick girl began to murmur something, in an uneasy, broken, restless fashion; and Alison leaned over to hear what she was saying. It was all about herself, she found; it was Ailie this—Ailie that; and apparently Agnes was ad-

dressing some third person, who she fancied was with her. Who that was Alison soon learned.

“Mother, mother,” the girl said—and now there was a curious hectic flush on her face, and the palm of her hand was burning hot—“mother,” she said, in those low and piteous tones, “you would not have let Ailie stand there crying if you could have come to her—you would have taken poor Ailie away—you would have brought her here, with us—we should have been all together. And—and if she was here now, I should not be afraid—Ailie was always the one to help me—but—but I am afraid—oh, don’t take me forward, mother!—don’t!—don’t!—the Lord Jesus—on the White Throne—and the golden crown, and the sickle that is to reap when the time is come to reap—it will be all so terrible!—let me wait here, mother—hide me, hide me!—let me wait here, for Ailie! . . . And you would have pitied her, mother—they were so cruel with her—and my father not speaking to her—and she was crying when she was in the church, and when she left the house. I looked up to the skies; I thought you would be crying, too, mother, when you looked down and saw poor Ailie, that was always your favourite; but there are no tears here—only those voices that are so far away; and I can see no one but you. No! no!—not yet!—don’t lead me forward yet, mother! I would

rather wait for Ailie; and she will take the one hand, and you the other, and I will go between you—and—and my eyes cast down—and perhaps the Lord Jesus will pity me, and not be angry. Mother, if only I had something to put at the foot of the Throne!—some flowers—but there were none when I came away—it was winter and everything was dark—there were none that I could bring with me. Will He be angry, mother, that I have brought nothing with me?”

“Hush, hush, Aggie!” the elder sister said, and she put her hand on the girl’s burning forehead.

And then it was that she opened her eyes again—which were fixed and staring; and she tried to lift her poor, helpless arm as if she would point to what she saw before her.

“Look!—look!—the great white banner—and the red letters on it—do you see what it says, mother—‘*For Sinners Slain*’—is He coming now? Is He coming this way, mother? Oh, look at the thousands and thousands of them, all robed in white, and singing—don’t you hear them, mother?—it’s Helmsley they’re singing—‘Lo, He comes with clouds descending, once for favored sinners slain’—listen, mother—it’s Helmsley they’re singing—‘Thousand, thousand saints attending, swell the triumph of His train’—was it singing like this that Ailie heard—in the cathedral somewhere?”

"Hush, dear, hush!" Alison said, soothingly, and she moistened the parched lips with the cooling drink that stood by.

The younger sister turned her glazed, staring eyes upon Alison, and seemed to recognize her—but as part of this rapt vision.

"Have you come, Ailie?" she said, in a low, hurried voice. "Do you see them?—do you see them there?—mother has gone away—she will be back—she has gone to tell them why I had nothing to put at the foot of the White Throne—she knew I was frightened. For it is all so different now, so different! Once He said 'Suffer the little children to come unto me;' but that was when He was a poor man, living among poor people; now He is the King of Glory, the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. 'Feed my lambs,' He said; but that was long ago; and He has forgotten now. Now He is the King of Glory—and the everlasting gates are opened before Him—oh, Ailie, He is coming!—give me your hand, quick, quick!—and be still—be still—maybe He will remember what He said once—maybe He will pity us and not be angry—I can—see—mother—pleading for us—"

She turned away with a wearied sigh; she closed her eyelids, and lay breathing heavily. And then in

the silence arose the solemn tones of the Minister's voice:

“I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together. I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.”

So the slow hours went by; and Alison sate there, patient and assiduous in her ministrations, and watching the strange fluctuations from burning heat to shuddering cold that marked the progress of the fever. There was no recurrence of violent delirium; but sometimes the girl would moan and mutter to herself, in a voice so low as to be almost inaudible. It was clear that she was not asleep; it was mere exhaustion that kept her eyes closed.

Towards midnight the old servant Margaret came up and whispered that she had prepared some food for Alison, and that she would take her place at the bedside (for Mrs. Cowan had gone home for the present). When Alison went down to the parlor, she found her husband still there; and she begged him to go back to the inn, but he refused to do that; he said he could pass the night very well in the arm-chair, and preferred

to remain in case he should be wanted. He did not tell her what the doctor had said.

The long night passed slowly and wearifully; the bleak, gray morning broke over the squalid little town; and the wan light entering by the window showed hardly any change in the condition of the sick girl, who, indeed, had fallen into a kind of stupor, taking no heed of anything, and suffering no longer from these delirious attacks. It was a lethargy of exhaustion; the fever had burned up the vitality of the delicate constitution; she lay in a sort of coma, as if asleep, but not asleep. When the doctor came, he looked grave and anxious; and he said a few words to the Minister out of Alison's hearing. He called two or three times during the day; and he hardly strove to conceal his fear that his patient was slipping away from under his care.

Towards nightfall it was evident to everybody that she was sinking fast. Alison, Mrs. Cowan, and the Minister were in the room; the servants were in the passage outside; Mr. Cowan, Ludovick Macdonell, and one or two relatives were in the parlor below, waiting to be summoned. And in the silence of the sick-chamber there was only the monotonous, mournful sound of the Minister's voice. He was walking up and down, repeating in slow and measured and earnest

tones verse after verse of Scripture, that perhaps the dying girl might overhear:

“‘For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.’”

And then again would come a pause of dreadful stillness, in which the poor woman Margaret could be heard sobbing in the passage without. But there was no faltering of the Minister’s voice, no trace of emotion in the stern, sad face.

“‘If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands.’

* * * * *

“‘Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.’

* * * * *

“‘Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry come unto thee. Hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble; incline thine ear unto me: in the

day when I call answer me speedily. For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as a hearth. My heart is smitten, and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread.' ”

* * * * *

“ ‘Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. . . . Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.’ ”

He repeated that last phrase again and again, so that she *must* overhear: “ ‘I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.’ ”

* * * * *

“ ‘Thus saith the Lord; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. Thus saith the Lord: Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord.’ ”

And surely it was to lend her courage on her entrance into the dark valley, that his voice now became even more solemn and strenuous:

“ ‘So when this corruptible shall have put on incor-

ruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.' ”

Here there was a longer pause, and Agnes opened her eyes and looked languidly around, as if seeking some one. Alison instantly bent down towards her.

“What is it, dear?”

Her eyes were still looking wearily for what she could not find.

“Where—is—he?” she asked.

“Do you mean Ludovick?” Alison said—and her sister’s eyes plainly answered yes.

She went hastily down-stairs and brought Ludovick up and into the room. When he came to the bedside, he instinctively took the dying girl’s hand in his, for she was too weak to raise it. And then she seemed to try to say something—but was unable.

“I know,” said he, stooping over her, “I know what you wish to say to me. It is what you said last night. And you want me to make a promise? Well, then, I do: you need not be afraid!”

Her last look was directed towards his eyes; and it

was a look of gratitude and kindness, of assurance and peace. He was still holding her hand when the change came; and the gentle, loving spirit passed quite quietly away, almost without a struggle.

It was the strong, resonant voice of the Minister that broke the hushed silence.

"Let us give praise to the Most High that He has seen fit to take another lamb into His fold."

And when he knelt down, and as the others knelt down—the two servants having come unbidden into the room—if the women were sobbing and crying, no tremor of emotion broke the clear tones of this old man's declaration of his acquiescence in the Divine will. What to him were the sorrows of this transitory life but as snow-flakes beating against the impregnable armor of his faith in the heavenly wisdom and mercy? Nay, this was no supplication, but rather a strenuous resignation. She who had been taken from them had been spared the trials and temptations and afflictions of years, and had entered early into the joy of her Lord. Why should we mourn, he said (almost as if addressing those grief-stricken relatives and friends) that she had won to her eternal rest a little while before others who had still to toil and fret in these earthly bonds, until the happy moment of their release should come? Death had been conquered; their young kinswoman had been

raised to everlasting life; to God be all the praise! It was a devout and sincere thanksgiving that the Minister poured forth, in measured, earnest, impressive sentences; but perhaps they had not all attained to his lofty and resolute disregard of the sufferings and tribulations of this brief moment of human existence; indeed, when the news got bruited abroad that night, there was more than one sad heart in the town, for the gentle, affectionate, frail-constitutioned girl had made many friends, even in this austere Kirk o' Shields.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOMEWARD.

OF course Ludovick and Alison had to wait for the funeral; but he did not choose that she should remain in Kirk o' Shields; he took her through to Edinburgh, under pretence of getting proper mourning for her; and there she was most kindly received by the Balwhinnans, who did what they could to assuage her all-absorbing grief. There also Ludovick had abundant opportunity of talking over his present circumstances with his old friend.

"I shall be glad when I get her finally and forever away from that place," he said. "It is not the right atmosphere for her; it never could have been. Naturally she is a most blithe and good-humored girl, alert and merry, quite contented with everything, nothing making her so happy as seeing those round about her in full enjoyment. She is far too quick-witted, she has too much common-sense, to believe in the gospel of useless renunciation—to believe in the efficacy of perpetual

little martyrdoms—to measure your chance of heaven by the number of groans and sighs you can crowd into an afternoon—”

“My good friend,” remonstrated Balwhinnan, smiling and shaking his head, “you will never understand those people.”

“I understand them as far as I have seen them,” the younger man said, confidently. “And what I have observed in them is plenty of faith, and plenty of hope, but not the fifteenth part of a grain of charity. Oh, I can tell you they let me know pretty clearly that I was a leper, and to be shunned; and what’s more, Alison saw it too—though she didn’t say anything; if it had not been for this great trouble occupying her entirely, I fancy she might have given a certain Mr. Cowan a bit of her mind. Not that it mattered to me; it amused me in a way. But the cheek of some people! Of course they have all the religion, and all the conscience, that exist among the sons of men; and the fashion in which they have secured a monopoly of the good things in the next world is just beautiful to behold. It seems to me, Balwhinnan, you want a modern apostle to go preaching through some of your South of Scotland smaller towns; and I could furnish him with a text for his sermons—Beware of spiritual pride.”

“At all events,” the advocate said, you are better

satisfied now that you did not go to law in order to find out where the young lady was."

"We did not appeal to the law; we broke it," Ludovick said, simply. "If that rascal of a lad had not made a most outrageous, violent, and unprovoked attack on an unoffending divinity student, I don't see how we ever could have found out where she was."

"But it will be all the easier for you now to make friends with the old Minister before you go back home—that is what your wife seems chiefly anxious about at present."

"I know," said the younger man, rather gloomily. "And I don't see much chance of it. When I first heard of that poor girl's illness, I thought it might offer a way towards some kind of reconciliation; but I am not so sure now. And I know Alison will be fretting over her father's loneliness. His loneliness! His loneliness seems to me merely the isolation of pride. Of course I admit that there is something fine in the contempt or indifference he seems to have for anything that may happen to him in this world; there is something fine in that; it is worthy of Epictetus, though I suppose he would call it ordinary Christian fortitude. I can see what is fine in that; even if it leads him to disregard the claims of natural affection, even if he refuses to his only daughter the trifle of sympathy and conside-

ration she is begging and praying for in her heart. Well, I will do what I can towards making matters smooth. I will go to him and offer him my hand; I will ask him for the briefest message of kindness that I may take to Alison—”

“Don’t you think,” his friend said, gently, “that it might be better for her to go herself?”

“She shall not do anything of the sort!” Ludovick said, with a flash in his eyes. “She has suffered enough already; she shall suffer no more, in that quarter. Do you think I want a jury of elders and elders’ wives to come together to consider her conduct? Do you think she is to go as a suppliant to *them*? Not while I can prevent it!”

“It was only a suggestion of mine,” the lawyer said, good-naturedly. “You see, you are not the most diplomatic person in the world, Macdonell; and you might go with some prejudice in your mind, some resentment, perhaps, over what happened formerly; and that might make things different. Then, again, you must remember the natural relation between father and daughter.”

“What did he do before?” the younger man demanded. “He handed her over to the custody of Mrs. Cowan. I suppose she was not deemed worthy to be in his sight. She was sent away to be purified of her

iniquities and transgressions; and then she was to come back a contrite penitent. And you see she is not a contrite penitent yet. If she went all by herself to that house, she might have her sins and enormities flaunted before her again. She might have the sermon that was preached at her from the pulpit repeated for her benefit. She might have that sickening hypocrite of a woman whining over her as a brand not yet plucked from the burning. Well, then, I say 'No, thank you,' to all that. She is not going to encounter anything of the kind. I will make it my business to see she shall *not*."

The advocate scratched his head.

"Well, I don't see what the mischief is to come of it all," he said, with a perplexed air. "I wish both of you were back in Lochaber, leaving time to smooth away these differences. But if you go to this old man with such an antagonism of feeling—"

Ludovick Macdonell—who was really a most good-humoured and generous spirited kind of person, when he was not harassed by these bitter memories—suddenly looked up, and said with a frank smile,

"You need not be afraid of that, Balwhinnan. I give you my word that when I go to see the old Minister I will abase myself down to the ground—for Alison's sake."

The day of the funeral was dark and grim. Over the thick smoke-laden atmosphere of Kirk o' Shields hung leaden skies; and a continuous rain poured into the melancholy streets. The funeral service, as is customary in Scotland, took place in the house, the friends and relatives assembling in the parlor, while the coffin lay in the room above. The Minister, worn of face and sad-eyed, but still with the same air of lofty resignation and acquiescence, stood at the head of the table, an open Bible before him, while in measured and monotonous tones he admonished this little group of sorrowing folk of the vanity and worthlessness of human life, and reminded them of the great eternal prize towards which they should be pressing, through these brief moments here below. And it was almost with tenderness, but with no break in his voice, that he referred to the young girl who had been taken away from them. She had been a faithful handmaid of the Lord. She had walked according to the light. In so far as her station and years allowed, she had been attentive to her duties; she had been as the child Samuel, who ministered unto the Lord before Eli the priest. And even as the Lord had called to Samuel, and the child had answered, "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth," so to this other young ministrant and servant He had sent His summons, and she had answered, and

gone home to her rest. Why should they weep, or doubt the infinite wisdom and mercy of Him who ruled all things, even the smallest? Their young sister in the Lord had only gone before, to her exceeding gain. And then he repeated the words of Paul to the Thessalonians: "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

But here a terrible thing occurred. The old servant-woman Margaret, who was standing near the door-way, was taken with a violent trembling, and she sank on her knees to the floor, and raised her clasped hands above her head, and called aloud, with a piteous cry.

"Lord God, have mercy upon me! have mercy upon me! They're a' looking forrit to seeing her again; they're a' to meet her there except me—except me! She'll no come near where I am—in the everlasting fire! Lord God, have mercy upon me! Will ye no have mercy on a poor sinner? Is there to be no mercy for me through all eternity? Lord God, have peety—have peety!"

The Minister paused. "Remove that poor woman," he said, in a calm, grave voice; and when they had

raised the poor trembling wretch and led her from the room, he continued the solemn, simple, unimposing service.

When that was over, the coffin was brought down and placed in the hearse; and as the sombre vehicle slowly moved alway, the male relatives and friends (the women-folk remaining in the house) proceeded to follow it on foot, two by two, led by the Minister himself and his chief elder, Mr. Cowan of Corbieslaw. The small, irregular black procession made its way through the rain and along these dingy thoroughfares till it reached the cemetery just outside the town. And of all the dismal sights about Kirk o' Shields, surely this was the most melancholy. Here were no white stones marking the graves of the loved and lost ones, no carefully tended flowers in their purity and sweetness emblematic of the kind remembrance, the wistful hope, that placed them there. The head-stones were dank and sodden with wet and smoke; the bits of bushes here and there were leafless, withered, and black; the very grass was grimy. The hearse came to within a few yards of the open grave, then the coffin was taken out and carried over, and slowly and reverently lowered into its resting-place. It had but the one white wreath upon it. That Alison had brought with her from Edinburgh; you cannot buy flowers in Kirk o' Shields if

you wished. There was no service by the side of the grave. When the coffin had been lowered, the friends and relatives took a last look; then, as the grave-diggers began their work, they fell to talking among themselves; finally, in scattered groups, they set out again for the town and for their several homes, walking through the heavy rain. Ludovick was alone all this time; no one had spoken to him, or taken any notice of him.

But when he returned to the Minister's house to fetch away Alison, he was surprised she had already gone, though Mrs. Cowan and one or two others of the women-folk were still there. She had returned to the inn, the servant-maid informed him, shortly after the funeral had left. So, as this seemed as good an opportunity as any for trying to come to some amicable understanding with the Minister, he bade the servant-lass inform Mr. Blair that he would like to see him for a moment. She knocked at the door of the Minister's room and delivered her message; Mr. Blair came out into the passage, and she discreetly disappeared.

"Mr. Blair," said Macdonell, "Alison will be going away this afternoon, and she would like to say good-by to you—"

"It is unnecessary," the Minister said, calmly.

"Perhaps so," said the intermediary, in as gentle

and submissive a fashion as possible, "but—but—it is only natural for a girl to wish to part on good terms with her father; and I think especially at such a time as the present there might be a—a little consideration for family ties. As for myself, I offer you my hand, and ask you to forget what is past, as I hope to do also. I don't wish to have any feeling of resentment towards any man, least of all towards Alison's father. I know you have reason to complain of me, and though I cannot honestly say that I regret having induced Alison to enter into that hasty marriage, still I can understand how it would strike you, and I ask your pardon."

Mr. Blair did not take the proffered hand.

"It is unnecessary, perhaps something more than unnecessary, for my daughter to come here," he said, in grave, deliberate tones, and there was no expression save that customary sadness in the sunken eyes and in the worn and lined face; "and it is unnecessary for you to make explanations or apologies for that which is now irremediable. To open up these matters again might merely lead to contention and reproach, which I am far from desiring. My daughter has chosen her own path; let her follow it. I will not be her judge. Perhaps when we win to the greater light we may see with different eyes. The Lord's ways are not as our ways; there may be guidance where we see but footsteps

wandering in the dark; in His good time we shall know all. As for you, I hope I bear you no enmity; I would part with you without bitterness; but before you go I would ask of you one question. Do I understand that you have not sought to lead away my daughter from the faith of her childhood, from the faith in which those of her house who have gone before have found peace and consolation in their dying hours? I—I understood it to be so—is it so?"

"Certainly it is so!" Ludovick said, with emphasis. "Alison is absolutely free in all such matters—of course she is. If she chooses to go to the Established Church in Fort William, that is simply because the Munroes go there: she may go to any church she pleases, and welcome."

"And if there are children of the marriage?" the old man said.

"If there are children of the marriage, they will be brought up in their mother's faith; I pledge you my honor to that."

Mr. Blair hesitated, but only for a second.

"I thank you," he said, in the same grave, unimpassioned voice, and he seemed about to go.

"But—but have you no message for Alison?" Ludovick asked, in an appealing kind of way.

"I would not have her think there was aught of bitterness in my heart against her," he answered; and

then he added, with slow impressiveness, "Nay, I wish you both well." And with that the Minister, reserved, austere, unapproachable, passed into his own room.

Ludovick Macdonell did not go straight back to the inn; he went along to the unfrequented thoroughfare overlooking the canal and the iron-works; and paced up and down there (though the rain was still falling heavily), that he might make the best of this message that he had to carry to Alison. And when at last he returned, and found her standing at the window, looking out into the wet streets, he said,

"Why did you leave the house, Ailie? I went back expecting to find you there."

She turned to him at once.

"Well, Ludovick," said she, somewhat proudly, "I did not choose that your wife should remain there to be—to be—looked at askance."

"Oh, you must not heed the looks, or the words either, of people like that!" said he, quite cheerfully. (Perhaps he was not so ill-pleased that his young wife had resented the manner of the elders' wives towards her.) "What are they to you? But I have brought a message for you from your father. Oh yes, he was not nearly so implacable as you might imagine; he was quite courteous and civil, in his reserved way. Of course,

he said he thought it would be unnecessary for you to go and bid him a formal good-by at the present time, and that he would rather not have me go into any explanations or excuses; and that is reasonable. I saw that he did not want to have any controversy, such as might arise, and might produce bitterness. No; he said he had no feeling against either of us; that perhaps it might appear to him some day as if everything had been for the best; and the last words he said, Ailie, were that he wished you well. These were his last words. *'I wish you both well,'* he said. Oh, I can look forward a year or two, and see what his present attitude will lead to; but in the mean time you ought to be very glad that he is so amicably disposed towards us. And there's another thing I've got to tell you, Ailie," Captain Ludovick continued, in the same cheerful and hopeful strain. "We are not going to set out for the Highlands this afternoon."

"No?" she said; and her face, that had been painfully anxious when he began to tell her of that interview, was now grown much more placid and grateful and content.

"No; at least, not directly back. The simple fact is this, Ailie: you are being thoroughly spoiled in Lochaber. You get such an inordinate quantity of petting that all your natural firmness of character is

being destroyed. It isn't wholesome; it's far from wholesome. The old laird is the worst, it is true; but the rest of them are nearly as bad. You're being softened and blunted into a sentimental, jelly-fish sort of condition."

"But it's very nice, Ludovick," she pleaded.

"I tell you it isn't wholesome. It is most detrimental to your character," Captain Ludovick maintained. "You want somebody to sharpen you—to keep your wits on edge—to make you hold your own, and give an account of yourself. Well, I'm going to get such a person. I am going to take you through to Glasgow to-night. To-morrow we shall go down the Clyde to Rothesay. There I shall take possession of your aunt Gilchrist, and carry her off with us to Fort William, and establish her at Oyre for the winter. That will counteract the petting, I think! And why shouldn't she spend the winter with us as well as at that Hydropathic place? My gracious! haven't we as pure drinking-water at Oyre as they've got at Rothesay?"

And well Alison knew what it was that had led him to make this proposal; it was no desire to provoke a series of temper-combats, good-humored as these assuredly would be, for his own amusement; it was the thought that she might feel a little lonely in the world

after the death of her sister, and herself removed from among her kinsfolk and former friends.

She went up to him and kissed him.

"Ah, Ludovick," she said, with swimming eyes, "you are so good to me!"

THE END.

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